魔法科高校の劣等生 7

横浜騒乱編〈下〉

The irregular
at magic high school

佐島勤
Tsutomu Sato

illustration／石田可奈
Kana Ishida

電撃文庫

魔法科高校の劣等生⑦
横浜騒乱編＜下＞

横浜で催される『全国高校生魔法学論文コンペティション』。この魔法科高校生徒達の晴れ舞台に、突如謎の武装集団が侵入した。彼らの正体は、『大陸』からやってきた大亜連合軍の魔法師とその機動兵器群。目的のためには市民殺害も厭わない武装軍によって大混乱に陥る中、司波達也は生徒会メンバーと共に窮地からの脱出を模索する。

同時刻。コンペ会場に、最新鋭魔法技術武装集団、国防陸軍第一〇一旅団独立魔装大隊が現れる。驚く七草真由美や十文字克人を尻目に、劣等生・達也は戦場の最前線へと向かうよう『命令』を受ける。訝しむ魔法科生徒達の中、

「お兄様。ご存分に」

「征ってくる」

深雪との『儀式』を終えた達也は、ついに、恐るべき“禁断の力”を解放する。

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さ-14-7

魔法科高校の劣等生⑦
横浜騒乱編〈下〉
佐島 勤

電撃文庫
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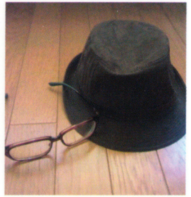

佐島 勤

西暦19XX年、日本の片田舎に生まれる。和洋のスペースオペラを糧に少年時代を過ごす。青年時代、ファンタジーと伝奇小説に転向。卒業後、企業戦士（ただし雑兵）として現実世界に魂を売り渡すも、西暦2011年、遅れてきたジュブナイル作家として空想世界に帰還を果たす。（本プロフィールには虚偽と誇張表現が含まれています）

【電撃文庫作品】

魔法科高校の劣等生① 入学編＜上＞
魔法科高校の劣等生② 入学編＜下＞
魔法科高校の劣等生③ 九校戦編＜上＞
魔法科高校の劣等生④ 九校戦編＜下＞
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魔法科高校の劣等生⑦ 横浜騒乱編＜下＞

イラスト：石田可奈

西暦19XX年生まれ。挿絵は初仕事。本業はアニメーター。『アクエリオンEVOL』のキャラクターデザインを担当。
SpecialThanks：ジミーストーンさん、坂上康治さん、
光陵瑠華さん、しぐれさん、松原麻弓さん、
伊藤タテキさん。

カバー／加藤製版印刷

魔法科高校の劣等生

The irregular at magic high school

7

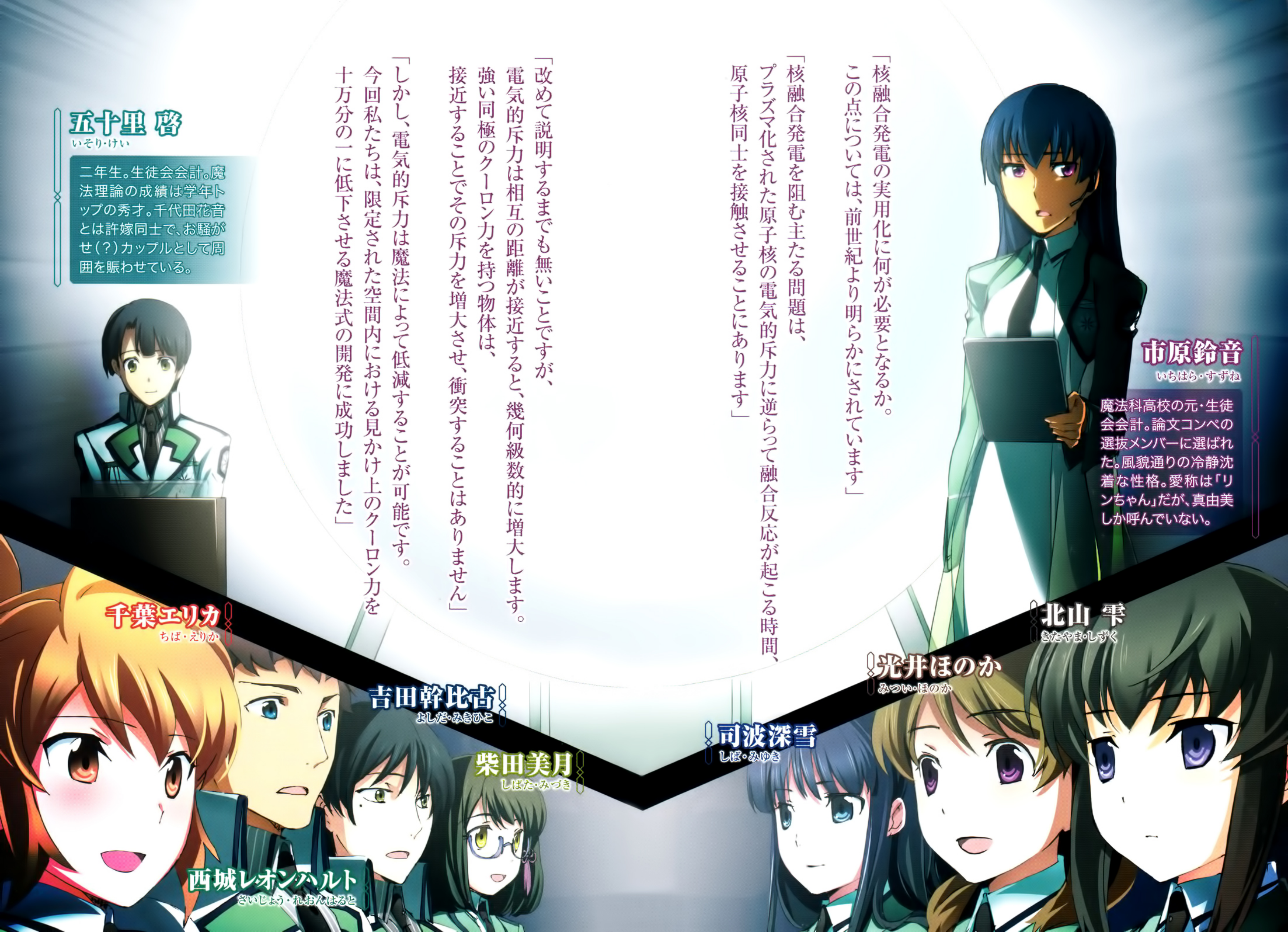
横浜騒乱編〈下〉

佐島勤
Tsutomu Sato

illustration／石田可奈
Kana Ishida

illustrator assistant／ジミー・ストーン、末永康子

design／BEE-PEE



「核融合発電の実用化に何が必要となるか。この点については、前世紀より明らかにされています」

「核融合発電を阻む主たる問題は、プラズマ化された原子核の電気的斥力に逆らって融合反応が起こる時間、原子核同士を接触させることにあります」

「改めて説明するまでも無いことですが、電気的斥力は相互の距離が接近すると、幾何級数的に増大します。強い同極のクーロン力を持つ物体は、接近することでその斥力を増大させ、衝突することはありません」

「しかし、電気的斥力は魔法によって低減することが可能です。今回私たちは、限定された空間内における見かけ上のクーロン力を十万分の一に低下させる魔法式の開発に成功しました」

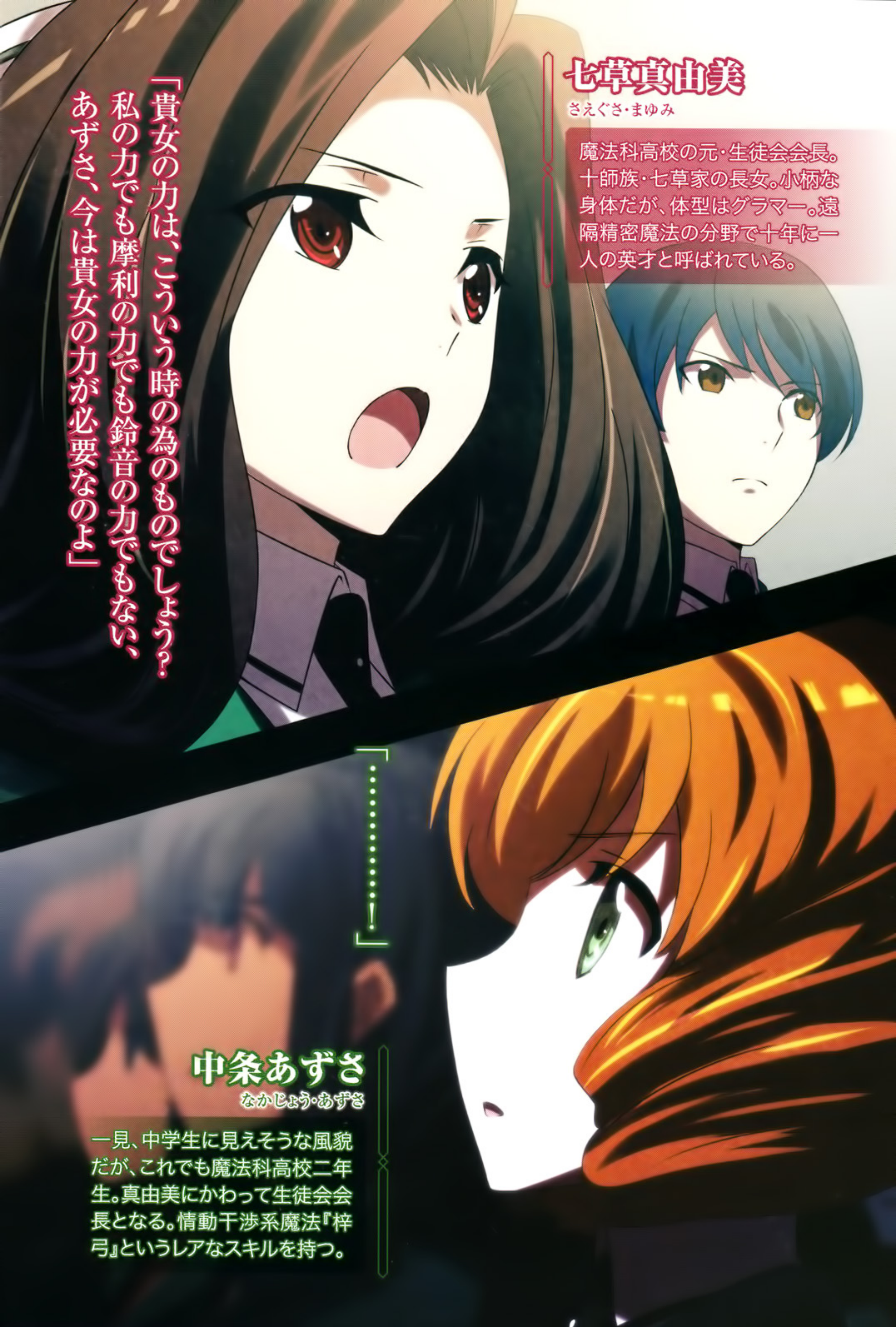
市原鈴音
いちはら・すずね

魔法科高校の元・生徒会会計。論文コンペの選抜メンバーに選ばれた。風貌通りの冷静沈着な性格。愛称は「リンちゃん」だが、真由美しか呼んでいない。

五十里 啓
いそり・けい

二年生。生徒会会計。魔法理論の成績は学年トップの秀才。千代田花音とは許嫁同士で、お騒がせ(?)カップルとして周囲を賑わせている。

北山 雫
きたやま・しずく
光井ほのか
みつい・ほのか
司波深雪
しば・みゆき
吉田幹比古
よしだ・みきひこ
柴田美月
しばた・みづき
千葉エリカ
ちば・えりか
西城レオンハルト
さいじょう・れおんはると



「貴女の力は、こういう時の為のものでしょう？
私の力でも摩利の力でも鈴音の力でもない、
あずさ、今は貴女の力が必要なのよ」

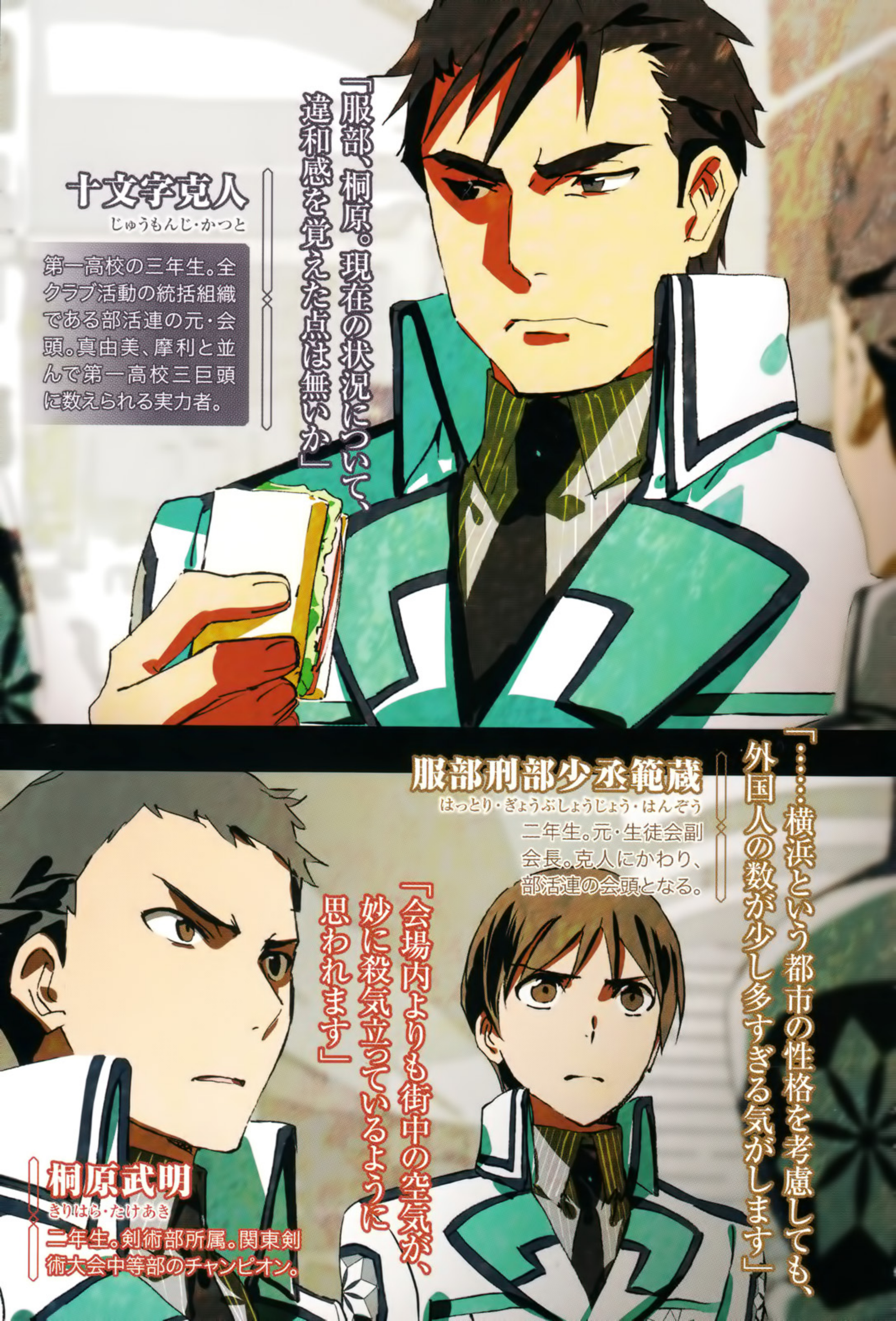
七草真由美
さえぐさ・まゆみ

魔法科高校の元・生徒会会長。十師族・七草家の長女。小柄な身体だが、体型はグラマー。遠隔精密魔法の分野で十年に一人の英才と呼ばれている。

「……………！」

中条あずさ
なかじょう・あずさ

一見、中学生に見えそうな風貌だが、これでも魔法科高校二年生。真由美にかわって生徒会会長となる。情動干渉系魔法『梓弓』というレアなスキルを持つ。



「服部、桐原。現在の状況について、違和感を覚えた点は無いか」

十文字克人
じゅうもんじ・かつと

第一高校の三年生。全クラブ活動の統括組織である部活連の元・会頭。真由美、摩利と並んで第一高校三巨頭に数えられる実力者。

「……横浜という都市の性格を考慮しても、外国人の数が少し多すぎる気がします」

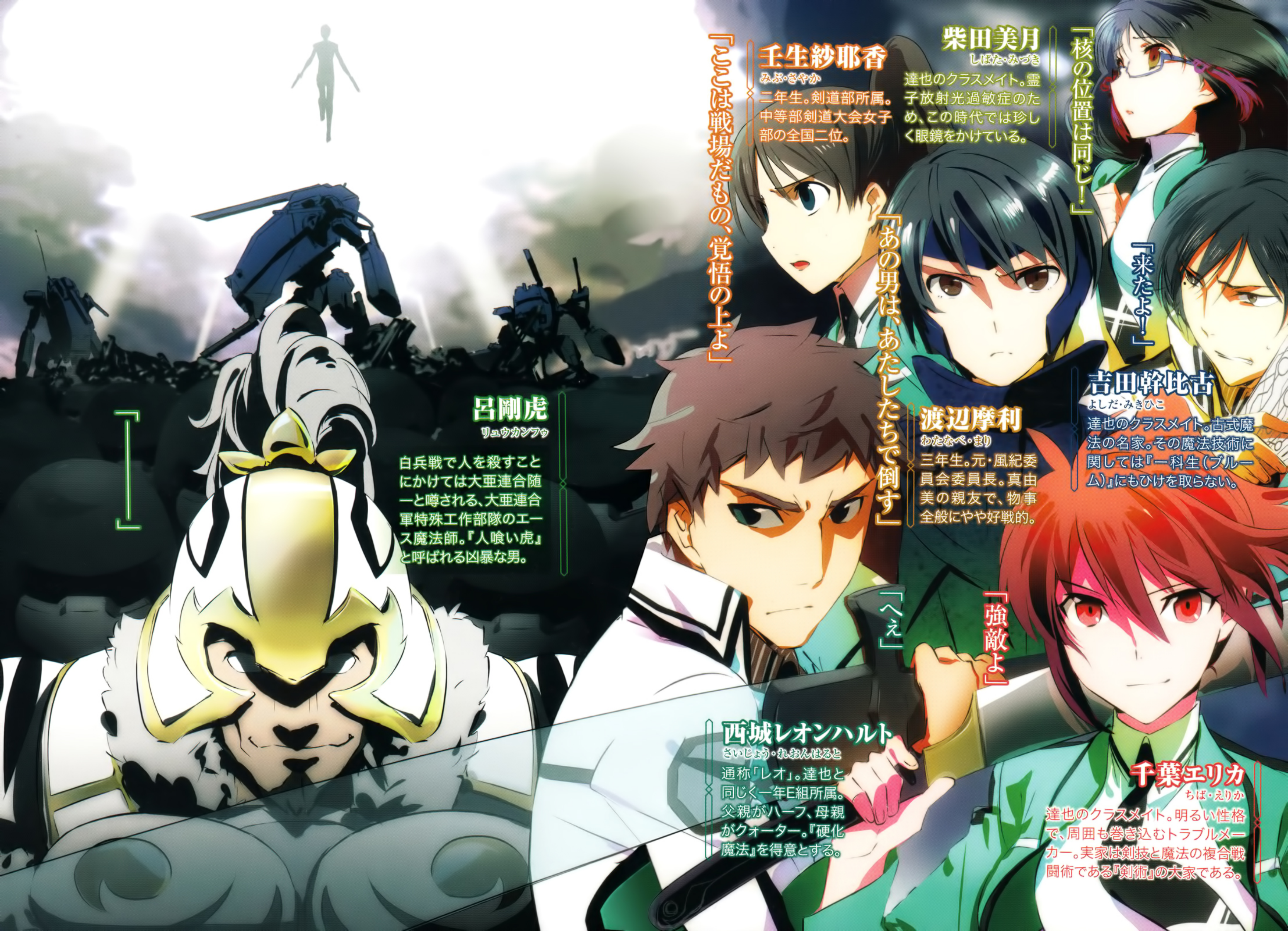
服部刑部少丞範蔵
はっとり・ぎょうぶしょうじょう・はんぞう

二年生。元・生徒会副会長。克人にかわり、部活連の会頭となる。

「会場内よりも街中の空気が、妙に殺気立っているように思われます」

桐原武明
きりはら・たけあき

二年生。剣術部所属。関東剣術大会中等部のチャンピオン。


「核の位置は同じ！」
「来たよ！」
「強敵よ」
「あの男は、あたしたちで倒す」
「へぇ」
「ここは戦場だもの、覚悟の上よ」
「――」

柴田美月
しばた・みづき
達也のクラスメイト。霊子放射光過敏症のため、この時代では珍しく眼鏡をかけている。

吉田幹比古
よしだ・みきひこ
達也のクラスメイト。古式魔法の名家。その魔法技術に関しては『一科生（ブルーム）』にもひけを取らない。

千葉エリカ
ちば・えりか
達也のクラスメイト。明るい性格で、周囲も巻き込むトラブルメーカー。実家は剣技と魔法の複合戦闘術である『剣術』の大家である。

渡辺摩利
わたなべ・まり
三年生。元・風紀委員会委員長。真由美の親友で、物事全般にやや好戦的。

壬生紗耶香
みぶ・さやか
二年生。剣道部所属。中等部剣道大会女子部の全国二位。

西城レオンハルト
さいじょう・れおんはると
通称「レオ」。達也と同じく一年E組所属。父親がハーフ、母親がクォーター。『硬化魔法』を得意とする。

呂剛虎
リュウカンフゥ
白兵戦で人を殺すことにかけては大亜連合随一と噂される、大亜連合軍特殊工作部隊のエース魔法師。『人喰い虎』と呼ばれる凶暴な男。

魔法剣

魔法による戦闘方法には魔法それ自体を武器にする戦い方の他に、魔法で武器を強化・操作する技法がある。銃や弓矢などの飛び道具と組み合わせる術式が多数派だが、日本では剣技と魔法を組み合わせて戦う「剣術」も発達しており、現代魔法と古式魔法の双方に魔法剣とも言うべき専用の魔法が編み出されている。

1. 高周波ブレード〔こうしゅうはブレード〕

刀身を高速振動させ、接触物の分子結合力を超えた振動を伝播させることで固体を局所的に液状化して切断する魔法。刀身の自壊を防止する術式とワンセットで使用される。

2. 圧斬り〔へしきり〕

刃先に斬撃方向に対して左右垂直方向の斥力を発生させ、刃が接触した物体を押し開くように割断する魔法。斥力場の幅は1ミリ未満の小さなものだが光に干渉する程の強度がある為、正面から見ると刃先が黒い線になる。

3. ドウジ斬り〔童子斬り〕

源氏の秘剣として伝承されていた古式魔法。二本の刃を遠隔操作し、手に持つ刀と合わせて三本の刀で相手を取り囲むようにして同時に切りつける魔法剣技。本来の意味である「同時斬り」を「童子斬り」の名に隠していた。

4. 斬鉄〔ざんてつ〕

千葉一門の秘剣。刀を鋼と鉄の塊ではなく、「刀」という単一概念の存在として定義し、魔法式で設定した斬撃線に沿って動かす移動系統魔法。単一概念存在と定義された「刀」はあたかも単分子結晶の刃の様に、折れることも曲がることも欠けることもなく、斬撃線に沿ってあらゆる物体を切り裂く。

5. 迅雷斬鉄〔じんらいざんてつ〕

専用の武装デバイス「雷丸（いかづちまる）」を用いた「斬鉄」の発展形。刀と剣士を一つの集合概念として定義することで接敵から斬撃までの一連の動作が一切の狂い無く高速実行される。

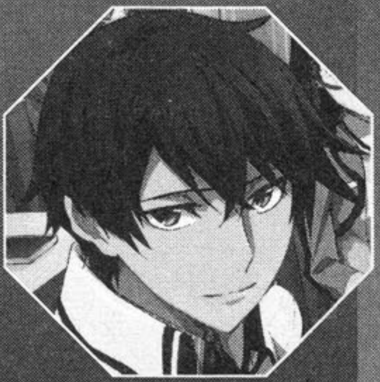
6. 山津波〔やまつなみ〕

全長１８０センチの長大な専用武器「大蛇丸（おろちまる）」を用いた千葉一門の秘剣。自分と刀に掛かる慣性を極小化して敵に高速接近し、インパクトの瞬間、消していた慣性を上乗せして刀身の慣性を増幅し対象物に叩きつける。この偽りの慣性質量は助走が長ければ長いほど増大し、最大で十トンに及ぶ。

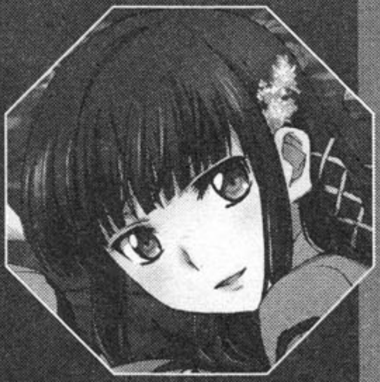
7. 薄羽蜻蛉〔うすばかげろう〕

カーボンナノチューブを織って作られた厚さ五ナノメートルの極薄シートを硬化魔法で完全平面に固定して刃とする魔法。薄羽蜻蛉で作られた刀身はどんな刀剣、どんな剃刀よりも鋭い切れ味を持つが、刃を動かす為のサポートが術式に含まれていないので、術者は刀の操作技術と腕力を要求される。

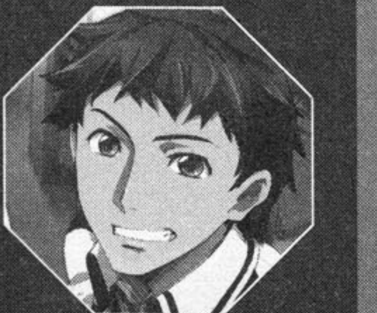
Character
キャラクター紹介



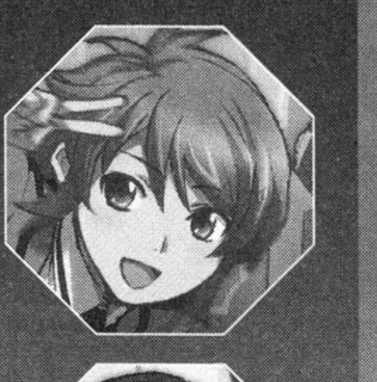
司波達也
しば・たつや
1年E組。『雑草』と
揶揄される二科生(劣等生)。
全てに達観している。



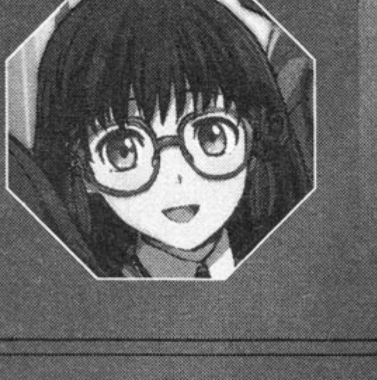
司波深雪
しば・みゆき
1年A組。達也の妹。
主席入学した優等生。
冷却魔法が得意。兄を溺愛する。



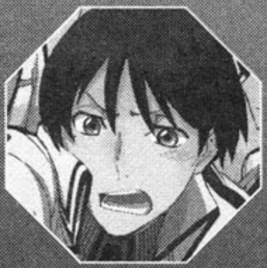
西城レオンハルト
さいじょう・れおんはると
1年E組。達也のクラスメイト。
硬化魔法が得意。明るい性格。



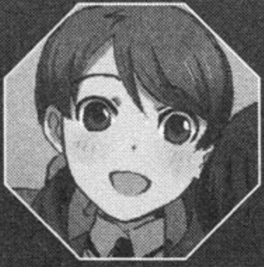
千葉エリカ
ちば・えりか
達也のクラスメイト。
剣術が得意。チャーミングな
トラブルメーカー。



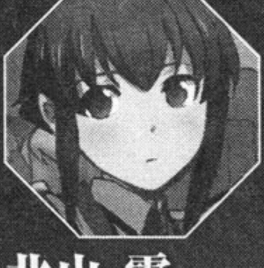
柴田美月
しばた・みづき
1年E組。達也のクラスメイト。
霊子放射光過敏症。
少し天然が入った真面目な少女。



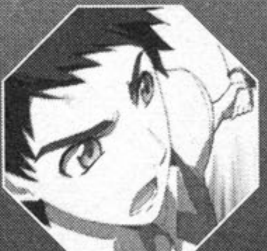
吉田幹比古
よしだ・みきひこ
1年E組。達也のクラスメイト。
古式魔法の名家。
エリカとは幼少時からの顔見知り。



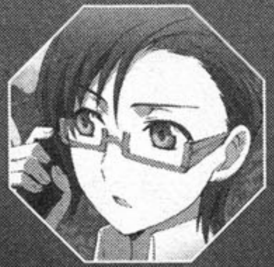
光井ほのか
みつい・ほのか
1年A組。深雪のクラスメイト。
光波振動系魔法が得意。
思い込むとやや直情的。



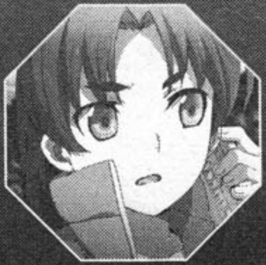
北山 雫
きたやま・しずく
1年A組。深雪のクラスメイト。
振動・加速系魔法が得意。
感情の起伏をあまり表に出さない。



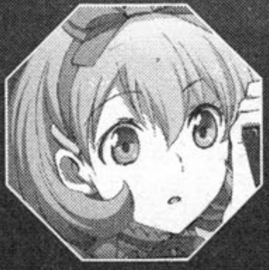
森崎 駿
もりさき・しゅん
1年A組。深雪のクラスメイト。
CAD早撃ちが得意。
一科生としての
プライドが高い。



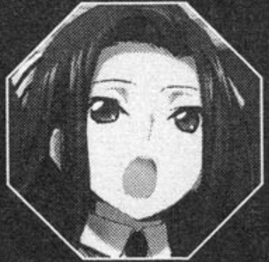
里美スバル
さとみ・すばる
1年D組。美少年と
見まごう少女。
明るくノリの良い性格。



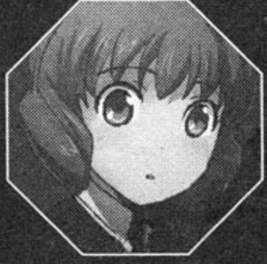
明智英美
あけち・えいみ
1年B組。クォーターで、
フルネームはアメリア＝
英美＝明智＝ゴールディ。



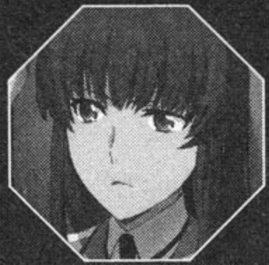
桜小路紅葉
さくらこうじ・あかは
1年B組。
スバル、エイミィの友達。
私服はゴスロリ風で、
テーマパーク好き。



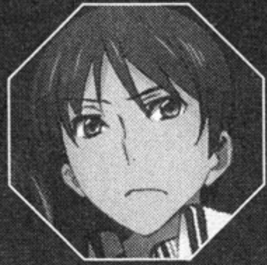
七草真由美
さえぐさ・まゆみ
三年生。元生徒会会長。魔法科生徒の中でも
その能力は歴代最高クラス。



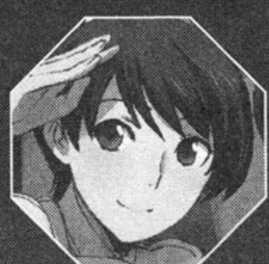
中条あずさ
なかじょう・あずさ
二年生。真由美にかわって
生徒会会長となる。
オドオドした性格で
引っ込み思案。



市原鈴音
いちはら・すずね
三年生。元・生徒会会計。
冷静沈着な頭脳派。
真由美の右腕。



服部刑部少丞範蔵
はっとり・ぎょうぶしょうじょう・はんぞう
二年生。元・生徒会副会長。
克人にかわり、部活連の
会頭となる。

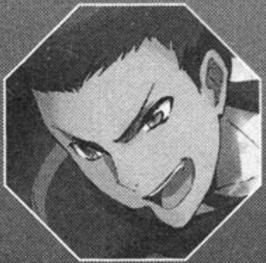


渡辺摩利
わたなべ・まり
三年生。元風紀委員会委員長。
真由美の親友で、
物事全般にやや好戦的。

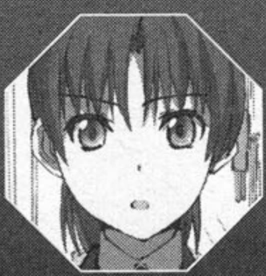
辰巳鋼太郎
たつみ・こうたろう
三年生。元風紀委員。豪快な性格の持ち主。

沢木 碧
さわき・みどり
二年生。風紀委員。
女性的な名前がコンプレックス。

関本 勲
せきもと・いさお
三年生。風紀委員会所属。
論文コンペ校内選考次点。



桐原武明
きりはら・たけあき
二年生。
剣術部所属。関東剣術大会
中等部のチャンピオン。



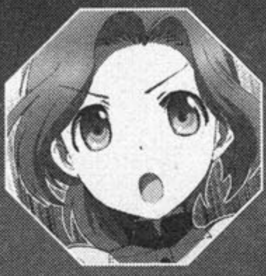
壬生紗耶香
みぶ・さやか
二年生。剣道部所属。
中等部剣道大会女子部の
全国二位。

平河小春
ひらかわ・こはる
三年生。九校戦ではエンジニアで参加。
論文コンペメンバーを辞退。

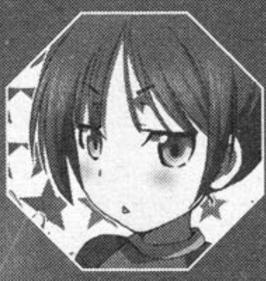
平河千秋
ひらかわ・ちあき
１年Ｇ組所属。達也に敵意を向ける。

安宿怜美
あすか・さとみ
保険医。おっとりホンワカした
笑顔が男子生徒に人気。

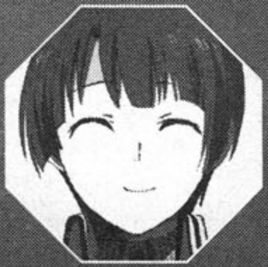
廿楽計夫
つづら・かずお
教師。専門は魔法幾何学。
論文コンペの世話役。



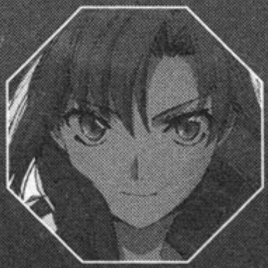
一条 茜
いちじょう・あかね
一条家の長女。
将輝の妹。
小学生だが、
ややマセている。



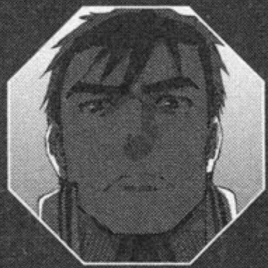
一条瑠璃
いちじょう・るり
一条家の次女。将輝の妹。
マイペースなしっかりもの。



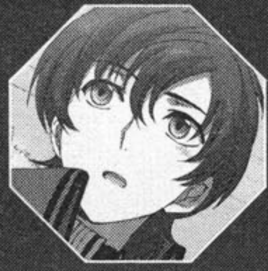
五十里 啓
いそり・けい
二年生。生徒会会計。
魔法理論の成績は
学年トップ。千代田花音とは
許嫁同士。



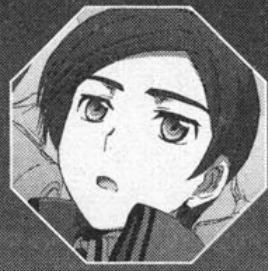
千代田花音
ちよだ・かのん
二年生。摩利にかわり、
風紀委員長となる。
五十里啓とは許嫁同士。



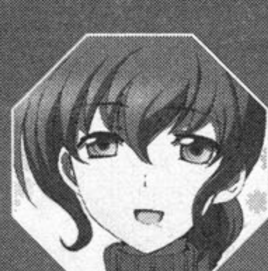
十文字克人
じゅうもんじ・かつと
三年生。
元・部活連の会頭。



一条将輝
いちじょう・まさき
第三高校の一年生。
九校戦に出場。
十師族・一条家の次期当主。



吉祥寺真紅郎
きちじょうじ・しんくろう
第三高校の一年生。
九校戦に出場。
「カーディナル・ジョージ」の
異名で知られている。



一条美登里
いちじょう・みどり
将輝の母親。
温和な性格で
料理上手。

九重八雲
ここのえ・やくも
古式魔法「忍術」の使い手。
達也の体術の師匠。

千葉寿和
ちば・としかず
千葉エリカの長兄。警察省のキャリア組。
一見は遊び人風。

千葉修次
ちば・なおつぐ
千葉エリカの次兄。摩利の恋人。
千刃流剣術免許皆伝で
「千葉の麒麟児」の異名をとる。

牛山
うしやま
フォア・リーブス・テクノロジーCAD開発
第三課主任。達也が信頼を置く人物。

リン
森崎が助けた少女。
フルネームは
『孫美鈴（スンメイリン）』。
香港系国際犯罪シンジケート
「無頭竜」の新たなリーダー。

陳祥山
チェンシャンシェン
大亜連合軍特殊工作部隊隊長。
非情な性格の持ち主。

呂剛虎
リュウカンフゥ
大亜連合軍特殊工作部隊所属の
エース魔法師。
別名『人喰い虎』。

小野 遥
おの・はるか
1年E組の総合カウンセラー。
いじられ気質だが、裏の顔も持つ。

風間玄信
かざま・はるのぶ
陸軍101旅団・独立魔装大隊・隊長。
階級は少佐。

真田繁留
さなだ・しげる
陸軍101旅団・独立魔装大隊・幹部。
階級は大尉。

柳 連
やなぎ・むらじ
陸軍101旅団・独立魔装大隊・幹部。
階級は大尉。

山中幸典
やまなか・こうすけ
陸軍101旅団・独立魔装大隊・幹部。
軍医少佐。一級の治癒魔法師。

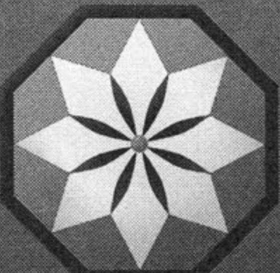
藤林響子
ふじばやし・きょうこ
風間の副官を務める女性士官。
階級は少尉。

九島 烈
くどう・れつ
世界最強の魔法師の一人と
目されていた人物。
敬意を以て「老師」と呼ばれる。

司波小百合
しば・さゆり
達也と深雪の義母。二人を嫌悪している。

周
チョウ
呂と陳を日本に手引きした
美貌の青年。

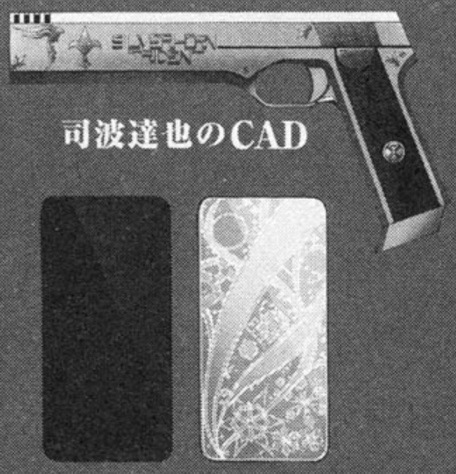
Glossary
用語解説


一科生のエンブレム

魔法科高校
国立魔法大学付属高校の通称。全国に九校設置されている。
この内、第一から第三までが一学年定員二百名で
一科・二科制度を採っている。

ブルーム、ウィード
第一高校における一科生、二科生の格差を表す隠語。
一科生の制服の左胸には八枚花弁のエンブレムが
刺繍されているが、二科生の制服にはこれが無い。

CAD〔シー・エー・ディー〕
魔法発動を簡略化させるデバイス。
内部には魔法のプログラムが記録されている。
特化型、汎用型などタイプ・形状は様々。


司波達也のCAD

司波深雪のCAD

フォア・リーブス・テクノロジー〔FLT〕
国内CADメーカーの一つ。
元々完成品よりも魔法工学部品で有名だったが、
シルバー・モデルの開発により
一躍CADメーカーとしての知名度が増した。

トーラス・シルバー
僅か一年の間に特化型CADのソフトウェアを
十年は進歩させたと称えられる天才技術者。

エイドス〔個別情報体〕
元々はギリシア哲学用語。現代魔法学において
エイドスとは、事象に付随する情報体のことで、
「世界」にその「事象」が存在することの記録で、
「事象」が「世界」に記す足跡とも言える。
現代魔法学における「魔法」の定義は、エイドスを改変することによって、
その本体である「事象」を改変する技術とされている。

イデア〔情報体次元〕
元々はギリシア哲学用語。現代魔法学においてイデアとは、エイドスが記録されるプラットフォームのこと。
魔法の一次的形態は、このイデアというプラットフォームに魔法式を出力して、
そこに記録されているエイドスを書き換える技術である。

起動式
魔法の設計図であり、魔法を構築するためのプログラム。
CADには起動式のデータが圧縮保存されており、
魔法師から流し込まれたサイオン波を展開したデータに従って信号化し、魔法師に返す。

サイオン(想子)
心霊現象の次元に属する非物質粒子で、認識や思考結果を記録する情報素子のこと。
現代魔法の理論的基盤であるエイドス、現代魔法の根幹を支える技術である起動式や魔法式は
サイオンで構築された情報体である。

プシオン(霊子)
心霊現象の次元に属する非物質粒子で、その存在は確認されているがその正体、その機能については
未だ解明されていない。一般的な魔法師は、活性化したプシオンを「感じる」ことができるにとどまる。

魔法師
『魔法技能師』の略語。魔法技能師とは、実用レベルで魔法を行使するスキルを持つ者の総称。

魔法式
事象に付随する情報を一時的に改変する為の情報体。魔法師が保有するサイオンで構築されている。

魔法演算領域

魔法式を構築する精神領域。魔法という才能の、いわば本体。魔法師の無意識領域に存在し、魔法師は通常、魔法演算領域を意識して使うことは出来ても、そこで行われている処理のプロセスを意識することは出来ない。魔法演算領域は、魔法師自身にとってもブラックボックスと言える。

魔法式の出力プロセス

❶起動式をCADから受信する。これを「起動式の読込」という。
❷起動式に変数を追加して魔法演算領域に送る。
❸起動式と変数から魔法式を構築する。
❹構築した魔法式を、無意識領域の最上層にして意識領域の最下層たる「ルート」に転送、意識と無意識の狭間に存在する「ゲート」から、イデアへ出力する。
❺イデアに出力された魔法式は、指定された座標のエイドスに干渉しこれを書き換える。

単一系統・単一工程の魔法で、この五段階のプロセスを半秒以内で完了させることが、「実用レベル」の魔法師としての目安になる。

魔法の評価基準（魔法力）

サイオン情報体を構築する速さが魔法の処理能力であり、構築できる情報体の規模が魔法のキャパシティであり、魔法式がエイドスを書き換える強さが干渉力、この三つを総合して魔法力と呼ばれる。

基本コード仮説

「加速」「加重」「移動」「振動」「収束」「発散」「吸収」「放出」の四系統八種にそれぞれ対応したプラスとマイナス、合計十六種類の基本となる魔法式が存在していて、この十六種類を組み合わせることで全ての系統魔法を構築することができるという理論。

系統魔法

四系統八種に属する魔法のこと。

系統外魔法

物質的な現象ではなく精神的な現象を操作する魔法の総称。
心霊存在を使役する神霊魔法・精霊魔法から読心、幽体分離、意識操作まで多種にわたる。

十師族

日本で最強の魔法師集団。一条(いちじょう)、一之倉(いちのくら)、一色(いっしき)、二木(ふたつぎ)、二階堂(にかいどう)、二瓶(にへい)、三矢(みつや)、三日月(みかづき)、四葉(よつば)、五輪(いつわ)、五頭(ごとう)、五味(いつみ)、六塚(むつづか)、六角(ろっかく)、六郷(ろくごう)、六本木(ろっぽんぎ)、七草(さえぐさ)、七宝(しっぽう)、七夕(たなばた)、七瀬(ななせ)、八代(やつしろ)、八朔(はっさく)、八幡(はちまん)、九島(くどう)、九鬼(くき)、九頭見(くずみ)、十文字(じゅうもんじ)、十山(とおやま)の二十八の家系から四年に一度の「十師族選定会議」で選ばれた十の家系が『十師族』を名乗る。

数字付き

十師族の苗字に一から十までの数字が入っているように、百家の中でも本流とされている家系の苗字には“『千』代田”、“『五十』里”、“『千』葉”家の様に、十一以上の数字が入っている。
数値の大小が力の強弱を表すものではないが、苗字に数字が入っているかどうかは、血筋が大きく物を言う、魔法師の力量を推測する一つの目安となる。

数字落ち

エクストラ・ナンバーズ、略して「エクストラ」とも呼ばれる、「数字」を剥奪された魔法師の一族。
かつて、魔法師が兵器であり実験体サンプルであった頃、「成功例」としてナンバーを与えられた魔法師が、「成功例」に相応しい成果を上げられなかった為に捺された烙印。

Chapter 8

Saturday, October 29, 2095 AD. Although class was still in session, each class was essentially self study. Aside from the practical skills classes, all the other classes were practically self study anyways, though for Course 2 students, half of their Practical Skills class was also self study, so it wasn't like this was any different than usual. —That being said, the typical class wouldn't be as rowdy as this.

Every so often, an explosion would sound off during Practical Skills, giving off the impression that the "tranquil campus" was blatantly false advertising. Actually, normally there would be some degree of ruckus, but they were usually more organized or settled. The reason for today's insanity was that the entire campus was filled with noise caused by the final examination for the materials required for tomorrow's Thesis Competition.

However, as one of the primary contributors, Tatsuya was in his classroom quietly doing his homework in front of a terminal.

Tatsuya was not concentrating on his homework that had no bearing on tomorrow's preparation because he was procrastinating or had been fired.......Strictly speaking, high school students leaving their homework to the last day to work on other preparations should still constitute "procrastinating".

His responsibilities for the day included verifying the run time conditions during the dress rehearsal and fixing any errors (all other inspections had been completed). Still, since the integral piece that is Suzune hadn't arrived, the dress rehearsal went on hold. Yesterday, he received a message saying that "she'll come to school in the afternoon", so there was no need to worry or be concerned, but that meant he had nothing to do for the Thesis Competition preparation.

After the end of the first period, just as he was about to relax and stretch, a sound caught his attention from the front.

Tatsuya didn't turn to Leo, who sat in front of him with his elbows on the back of the chair, but to Erika standing next to him as she called out to him.

"Tatsuya-kun, when do you enter the conference hall tomorrow?"

Although Erika tried her utmost to feign disinterest, her effort was dashed by Leo pricking his ears at the conversation.

These two, what the heck are they planning......? Tatsuya thought with astonishment, but this wasn't anything confidential.

"We meet at 8 AM before the conference hall and the opening ceremony is at 9 AM. The ceremony lasts 30 minutes, so the official contest starts at 9:30 AM. Each team is allotted 30 minutes, and there will be a 10 minute break in between, with four teams presenting before lunch break from noon to 1 PM. Five teams will present in the afternoon, so the competition will end around 4:10 PM. Afterwards, there will be evaluations and the awards ceremony, so the expected end time will be around 6 PM."

"......So, when will our school be presenting?"

Erika was a little dizzy since her first question received such an overwhelming response, but she finally managed to get it straight.

After failing to thoroughly confound her, Tatsuya simply switched over to an honest answer.

"First High is second to last and will start at 3 PM."

"Then don't you have a lot of time?"

"Indeed. That's why the primary speaker, Ichihara-senpai, is entering the conference hall after noon. Isori-senpai and I will be in early to take care of the equipment and handle any emergencies."

"Hm~. At any rate, you guys will meet up there. What about the demonstration device?"

"The Student Council will arrange for a transportation company. Hattori-senpai will ride along."

"Hattori-senpai, wasn't he going to be Ichihara-senpai's bodyguard?"

"I heard that Saegusa-senpai and Watanabe-senpai are going to get Ichihara-senpai tomorrow. Speaking of which, why do you want to know?"

At Tatsuya's unexpected question, Erika fidgeted and could not come up with a reply.

Sparing a glance at the indecisive Erika, the hitherto silent Leo finally opened his mouth.

"Well, those bodyguards, could we get in on that?"

Seeing the blatantly displeased Erika keeping mum, the contents were likely something the two of them had already discussed ahead of time.

"That shouldn't be a problem...... But why would you want to get involved in such an irksome task?"

To Tatsuya, this was an obvious line of inquiry, whereas Leo let out an embarrassed smile.

Tatsuya glanced at Leo, then towards Erika. Leo wore a self-mocking smile as he returned Tatsuya's gaze while Erika sought to dodge Tatsuya's look.

"I already asked for time off from school to train this guy. Wouldn't I look like a complete moron if everything was handled without giving us a chance to shine?"

Her eyes elsewhere, Erika added in an unhappy tone. She appeared to be aware of the unpublished incident at the Special Detention Center and was complaining because she estimated that she missed out because of her absence. Unfortunately, even though Erika wanted to use someone like Lu Gonghu to serve as a punching bag to train Leo, that plan seemed doomed.

"Regardless of your motive, we need all the help we can get. Also, there's no guarantee that nothing will happen."

"Eh? I thought everything was already settled?"

Suddenly, Mikihiko jumped in on the conversation as if he had been eavesdropping the entire time.

There was no need to point out the fact he was listening in on them — if they did, their other friend who was engaged in the same activity may panic and cause a ruckus — so Tatsuya answered the question with this.

"Is there a rule that states incidents happen singularly and by themselves?"

Tatsuya did not inform his friends that the chief suspect for the mastermind of this entire incident, Chen Xiangshan, remained at large. Nor did he plan to do so in the future. His answer remained purely theoretical, but Tatsuya believed that was enough at this standpoint.

"There are people taking aim at the Thesis Competition every year. An example of this would be being ambushed on the way home from the event proper. Even if we handled the incident before the competition begins, that doesn't mean that nothing will occur during the competition itself, correct?"

"Well...... You're right. Then can I also help with security?"

After deeply contemplating those words, Mikihiko was suddenly highly motivated as he made his offer, to which Tatsuya nodded with a smile.

"Then, we're relying on you."

Even if they handled one hurdle, that doesn't mean they can let down their guard. That was only human nature.

Yet, strictly based on the results, Tatsuya undoubtedly was dead wrong at this juncture.

◊ ◊ ◊

The day before the Thesis Competition, Suzune asked for the day off from school and pushed the dress rehearsal to the afternoon before arriving at the hospital.

Hattori tagged along because he was worried that Suzune would run into danger if she ventured alone, hence Mayumi, Mari and Hattori...... At any rate, everyone around her fiercely disagreed, but finally reached the compromise of Hattori accompanying her.

She lightly knocked twice on the sickroom door.

"Come in."

A solemn, feminine voice replied from within the room.

Hattori remained in the corridor. The one who met Suzune at the door was a resident doctor at the magic university affiliated First High, Yasuyado Satomi. She must have come earlier to visit Chiaki.

The young girl was sitting in bed with her head bowed. Chiaki didn't even respond to Suzune's arrival.

"Doctor, does Hirakawa Chiaki have any psychological disorders?"

Completely out of the blue, Suzune bluntly directed this question to Dr. Yasuyoda.

"No, there's no sign of psychological trauma that would pose a communication issue. Still, since there's no way to directly diagnose her 'mentality', I cannot say she is entirely healthy."

"It will be fine so long as she can hear my words."

Hearing Yasuyoda's response, Suzune rose to her feet. She went around the bed to stand before the window and spoke to Chiaki with her back facing the young girl.

"Hirakawa Chiaki-san, you are unable to rouse Shiba-kun's interest with your methods."

Suzune's words were oddly calm. She was coldly pointing out the facts without applying any comfort, encouragement, sarcasm, or ridicule.

"Favorable impression is of course out of the question, you cannot stir enmity or even hostility. To him, the current you is nothing more than a face in the crowd."

Most people who heard Suzune's words would accept this simply as the truth. Yet, this was sufficient to bring out her rebuttal.

"So what!"

That, was enough. Suzune was able to successfully tap Chiaki's words and emotions that lurked beneath her combative and resistant attitude.

......Even if it was 100% negative, this was still a crucial first step.

"I know that I'm inconsequential to someone like him. I don't need senpai to point out each and every detail!"

Regardless of whether she was facing Sayaka or Kanon, Chiaki maintained a resistant stance which she also adopted towards Suzune.

However, Suzune had a different reaction compared to those two.

"On some level, I believe that your assessment of Shiba-kun is spot on."

Heedless of Chiaki's screams, Suzune continued on with her back facing Chiaki.

"True, he is an arrogant person. He couldn't care less how the mortals cry and sue for help. Forget compassion, he would not even waste his time to ridicule the masses. Even when harassed, he would only dispel the irritation like one shoos away a fly."

Her head lowered, Chiaki bit her lip in frustration. After listening to Suzune's words, she recalled the incidents surrounding recruitment week back in April and more or less understood what she was saying.

At the time she felt that there was nothing they could do to him aside from harassment, but now many high school students like Chiaki realized they were dead wrong.

If he desired so, that man could capture any opponent who dared to use magic to try and lay a snare for him.

The sole reason he refrained was that he simply had no interest in doing so.

In reality, the level of harm those magic attacks inflicted on him was nothing more than mosquito bites, and she who could not even do that much was lower than even those pests......

In order to hold back the tears of frustration that seemed to well forth from her heart, Chiaki couldn't help but clench her fists to the point that her nails dug into her palm.

Ignoring Chiaki's current state — or simply feigning ignorance — Suzune kept her back to the girl as she continued.

"Hirakawa-san, did you know? During the final examination for the first semester, Shiba-kun received a top score that sowed despair in the hearts of everyone beneath him. Especially in Magic Engineering, where he received an astonishing full marks."

"......What's your point?"

"And the one who received Second Place in the Magic Engineering portion of the exam for Year 1 students is you."

Suzune turned to look at her now. Although her expression remained calm, her eyes were smiling warmly.

"You scored 92 out of a possible 100. Normally, no one would be surprised if you took First Place with that score."

"......And what of it?"

"Unfortunately, you stand no chance of threatening Shiba-kun in any other field. Yet, if restricted solely to Magic Engineering, I believe it is still possible for Hirakawa-san to surpass Shiba-kun."

Chiaki suddenly lifted her head.

Her eyes widened at the same time her "disbelief" transformed into a "may be possible" hope.

"Since three weeks ago, after working alongside him, I noticed that Shiba-kun is much handier with software compared to hardware. Of course, his hardware abilities far exceed those of a high school student, but are certainly not so advanced that the gulf can't be bridged. Although Magic Engineering in Year 1 focuses largely on software, after advancing to Year 2, hardware becomes the focus. I recall that Hirakawa-san specializes in hardware, correct?"

The point Suzune was trying to make was that once she advanced to the Year 2 courses dominated by hardware, she would have a chance for a reversal — that was how Chiaki rationalized this.

A small voice in her consciousness whispered that this was an overly optimistic outlook, but she chose to ignore it.

Seeing the self-destructive attitude fade from Chiaki's face only to be replaced by positive emotions shining from her eyes, Suzune's expression softened.

"If you continue to hold onto that indomitable spirit, I believe one day you can accomplish this."

Suzune did not say what she could accomplish.

Nor did Chiaki ask.

There was no need to go into detail here.

An overarching "something" was sufficient as a goal.

"Please come to the conference tomorrow. I believe you will benefit quite a bit."

Suzune's retreating figure from the sickroom was not reflected in Chiaki's eyes.

Maybe she could accomplish something — the anesthesia named "possibility".

After injecting revitalizing medicine into the flagging spirit that may have walked to its doom, a momentous change came over Chiaki's heart.

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"Err...... Ichihara-senpai? If you don't feel well......"

Seeing the terrible countenance on Suzune's face as she left the room, Hattori asked her in a wavering manner.

"No, there's no need to worry. Just going through a bout of self-loathing right now."

Suzune was not a talented speaker. While she excelled in debating, she generally refrained unless there was a pressing need. Though it must be owned that she was more verbose in Mayumi's company, generally she was a taciturn individual.

Well aware of this, Hattori picked up on the words "self loathing", but wordlessly followed her without asking any further questions.

From Suzune's perspective, she allowed Hattori to accompany her because he was someone who knew how to read between the lines. As she expected, he did not pursue the conversation any longer.

(Seriously...... It looks like I have all the talents necessary for a con man.)

Beneath the calm exterior of her poker face, Suzune repeatedly ridiculed herself.

Rather than trying to help Chiaki pull herself together, her goal was more in line with that she felt it was a great pity Chiaki's talent was going to waste.

Also, she wasn't doing this on behalf of herself or Hirakawa's older sister who was in the same grade.

She was doing this for her alma mater.

The Ichihara Family was an Extra Family that had lost their number.

Now, discrimination against Extra Numbers was officially frowned upon, but that was a recent turnaround that happened twenty years ago. In her parents' generation, discrimination and bigotry ran rampant in their youth. Suzune's father was tragically ostracized in the magical community, hence they always hid the fact that the Ichihara Family was once the Extra "Ichihana" Family from her.

Suzune's childhood always had that shadow hanging over her. Once she reached middle school, she learned of the truth that her father hid from her as well as the reason for it. Possibly because of this reason, Suzune never felt that she belonged to the magical community.

Her first and foremost sense of belonging was to her school, the magic university affiliated First High.

Thus, she felt deeply indebted to Mayumi for giving her this opportunity as well as a powerful sense of school spirit that was second to no one.

During the Nine Schools Competition in the summer, Suzune and the other members of the brass from First High noticed a looming issue with the lack of magic engineers in the underclassmen.

The Year 1 Men's Team obtained unfavorable results not only because of their mentality; Suzune and the others reached an accord on another primary reason.

There were talented individuals like Azusa, Isori, and Tatsuya.

But, there were simply too few.

Remove those three, and the skill level dropped like a rock.

Underclassmen, especially the cultivation of magic engineers in the Year 1 students, became the first priority for the last semester that remained to them. In particular, encouraging talented Course 2 students was a focal point.

Course 1 students under direct teacher supervision was another story, but only the Student Council and Club Activities Group could locate quality talent lurking in the Course 2 students who weren't being nurtured by the faculty.

Among them, Hirakawa Chiaki walked into Suzune's line of sight.

A Year 1 student who loitered around with illegal tools. After some digging, she once scored very well in magic engineering and excelled in hardware repair and modification.

Her talents must be put to use for the alma mater.

In order to accomplish this, Suzune arrived at the conclusion that inciting her to compete against Shiba Tatsuya would be the most effective way.

(Oh well, not like this spells misfortune for anyone.)

......Using this sentence to draw her mental struggle to a close, Suzune truly was a young woman who befitted a "cool" description.

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The conference hall would be in Yokohama this year, so First High's representatives just had to meet up in the morning of the opening ceremony. Last year, the competition was held in Kyoto, so they had to depart the day before and spend the night over there.

For the same reason, representatives of schools in remote locations departed for Yokohama a day or two before and sought lodgings.

Kichijouji Shinkurou, bearing the title "Cardinal George", also did so as one of the representatives for Third High, one of the favorites to win this year.

Third High's representatives would present last. With modern transit's speed and comfort, they could reach Yokohama from Kanazawa even if they left the morning of, but that did not guarantee that nothing out of the ordinary would occur along the way. Thus, the team elected to leave school at noon the day before and spend one night in Yokohama.

"George, it's about time."

"Already? Got it, I'm on my way."

Kichijouji, who was currently reading something wholly unrelated to the Thesis Competition and the subsequent report, responded to Masaki's call and thumbed the power button of the Book Player in his hands.

(Wish I could bring this along. Maybe I could ask for permission......)

The trip to Yokohama took 3 hours.

It was simply too boring to sit there and stare.

Kichijouji reluctantly glanced at his Book Player carrying the unfinished article.

However, the data recorded within had been restricted by the National Magic University and it was forbidden to remove it from the premises.

Any request to borrow the material would undoubtedly be rejected.

With a sigh, Kichijouji forced himself to curtail any lingering attachments (not that there was anything important enough to warrant this overblown statement).

He put the book back on the shelf and stood up after picking up the travel bag by his feet.

The itinerary for Yokohama called for a large bus that could bring their stage device along.

Accurately speaking, they were taking the bus to the loading point, loading the entire bus onto the bullet train (cargo trains that could carry entire buses were now commonplace), and then heading to Yokohama at 600 kilometers per hour, so they would reach their destination without switching rides (mostly).

Although he wasn't exactly normal, he was still a 15 year old high school student. If he didn't have to worry about the other passengers, he probably wouldn't be bored if he could chat with his friends, he thought.

They were probably going to meet that man in Yokohama.

No, they were going to meet again, that was the more appropriate description.

Using the Year 1 student from First High whom they secretly saw as their rival as the topic, he could definitely use the man's young sister to tease his best friend to spend the time, Kichijouji thought with a wicked smile on his face.

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There was an upper class bar located near the top floor of the skyscraper "Yokohama Bay Hills Tower" that overlooked the Yokohama Harbor. A man and woman were taking in the scenery while raising glasses filled with ruby red fluid to their lips.

"The new wine from this year is quite exquisite."

"A pity I cannot identify the differences in taste. My apologies for wasting the choice wine you provided."

Unlike her usual inconspicuous garb, tonight Fujibayashi paid careful attention to her attire as she charmingly smiled, prompting Inspector Chiba Toshikazu to frantically wave his empty hand.

"No, this wine is a fresh product that the private bar here doesn't care about, so you can bring it into the store as soon as it's ready...... It's not really valuable......"

"Ara, isn't it wonderful to be able to sample this so quickly after its fermented?"

With Fujibayashi tilting her nose closer to the glass as she closed her eyes and slowly twirled the wine in the glass before opening her eyes to reveal a smoldering gaze, Toshikazu could only smile awkwardly.

"......Ah, so long as you like it. Thanks to Fujibayashi-san, the case was finally wrapped up, so please consider this my insufficient gift of appreciation."

"Pot, meet kettle, Mr. Inspector. After all, I couldn't just let them run wild either."

"Is that the Fujibayashi Family's stance? Or is it...... Nay, my apologies."

Noticing the clear eyes watching him without a trace of intoxication, Inspector Chiba recalled his agreement with Fujibayashi.

She only had one condition for providing information integral to the investigation.

And that was to "never ask of her background or goals".

Not asking about her background appeared to be an odd request for Fujibayashi Kyouko.

She was the daughter of the famous Fujibayashi Family who were renowned for Ancient Magic and the granddaughter of Kudou Retsu, one of the elders from the Ten Master Clans, which was something he knew in the beginning.

On top of this, she added a condition to "never ask for her background", which blatantly implied that she was more than meets the eye.

"Speaking of which, Mr. Inspector. Was the invitation today solely to 'return the favor'?"

"Eh!?"

Seeing the eldest son of the Chiba Family almost spray the contents of his glass all over the place, the young lady of the Fujibayashi Family smiled because of her successful surprise attack.

"If Mr. Inspector is available, I would enjoy his company beyond tonight and even tomorrow."

"Eh, ah, O-Of course! If you don't mind, of course I will accompany you!"

Chiba Toshikazu had not led a life wholly devoid of female company. The Chiba Family's dojo also had female disciples and his sister once fiercely berated him as the "dishonorable and lecherous Kazu-nii" owing to his wild days during his years as a student.

Rather than saying that he wasn't used to associating with women or was inept at dealing with women, it would be more appropriate to say that Fujibayashi was just special.

"Thank you very much. Then, shall we say 8:30 in the morning at the Sakura Town Bus Station?"

"......Morning?"

Inspector Chiba could only stare blankly at the smirking Fujibayashi.

"Are you unaware that tomorrow they are holding the National High School Magic Thesis Competition at the International Conference Hall?"

"No, I do know that......"

"I am acquainted with one of the young men presenting tomorrow, so I have to go cheer him on."

"Ha......"

Although he wasn't going to say this, Inspector Chiba's face seemed to betray his expectations for "I thought you meant something else". Fujibayashi's enticing words naturally led him to interpret her words as "accompany me tomorrow (night)".

Seeing Toshikazu's expression, not only did Fujibayashi not bat an eyelid, her smile remained the same as well.

"Oh, yes, make sure to inform all your subordinates as well. Make sure to prepare not only their CAD, but also weaponry and live ammunition would be of great assistance."

"Fujibayashi-san, what are you......"

The listless expression was swiftly dashed by shock and tightened as if someone had poured cold water on him.

"Of course, let's hope that nothing happens."

After answering Inspector Chiba's question this way, Fujibayashi quietly filled her wine glass.

Chapter 9

The opening day for the National High School Magic Thesis Competition.

Tatsuya and Miyuki arrived at the rendezvous site without any accidents along the way.

The path was clear because the cargo truck bringing the stage devices had already unloaded its cargo.

Isori appeared to have beat them here,

And they could also see Kirihara with Sayaka in tow.

Based on their timing, the siblings appeared to be the last ones to arrive.

"......Onii-sama, I believe you need to do something."

Tatsuya's consciousness, that had been doing its best to escape from reality as an innocent bystander, was forcibly dragged back into the mix by Miyuki's voice.

"Do I have to do something......?"

Faced with Tatsuya's sour expression, Miyuki nodded in "deep regret".

Before their downcast eyes, Erika and Kanon were glaring darkly at one another.

"What's the matter?"

Tatsuya was not the only one present who was a close acquaintance of both Erika and Kanon.

In terms of closeness, Miyuki also counted as one of their dear companions, whereas Isori certainly outranked Tatsuya from a relationship standpoint.

Yet, Kanon refused to listen to Miyuki's mediation or Isori's nudge to remain neutral.

Sighing, Tatsuya interposed between the two glaring individuals.

"Ah, Tatsuya-kun, good morning-"

After Tatsuya joined in, Erika quickly gave him a carefree greeting.

While completely ignoring her opponent in the glaring contest.

Now, Kanon's eyes darkened even further.

Seeing this, Tatsuya got a firm grasp of the situation.

However, even with that understanding, he was still stuck between a rock and a hard place.

"—Shiba-kun, why don't you speak with this unreasonable ojou-sama?"

(Seriously...... Not even a "would you like to", but a "why don't you", eh......)

Whether or not Kanon consciously realized this, her word usage had thrown the entire burden over to Tatsuya for him to handle.

"Ha......"

Nonetheless, Tatsuya adopted a "it doesn't matter" kind of attitude. No matter how Kanon saw this, when compared to the two of them fighting it out, if he could swiftly put an end to all the fuss, at least the incident would be quickly handled even if he was a little heavy handed.

"If you're leaving all the decision making to me, then I'm not going to hold back."

Tatsuya didn't include any further conditions but asked for the power of attorney.

Realizing this, Kanon unwillingly furrowed her brows.

However, once she saw Isori next to her refrain from objecting, she grudgingly accepted this.

Tatsuya brought Erika and Leo to one side of the main conference hall and sat down on the sofa.

(Naturally, Miyuki sat next to him.)

"......Well, I get the overall gist of things."

Tatsuya said towards the two individuals who were set on causing mayhem.

"Erika probably didn't want a head-on confrontation either."

"......Sorry. I ended up causing Tatsuya-kun a lot of trouble......"

This rare, praiseworthy attitude that Erika displayed astonished Tatsuya. Based on her personality, she wasn't the type to read the subtle changes in other's emotions as her strong (more like "intentional") personality often rubbed people the wrong way despite her good intentions, thus leading to considerable awkwardness.

In this regard, Tatsuya still had a long way to go as a judge of character. The human heart was not something that could be so easily deciphered like magic.

"—It's not like you have to be part of the security detail, you can cheer us on from the audience stands. If anything happens, no one would complain if you chipped in to help."

Tatsuya intentionally placed emphasis on the word "help". Hearing this, Erika's previously downcast expression reverted to her usual warmth to the point that the corners of her lips twitched in a smile that clearly said "you evil man".

"Help, eh?"

"If you're bored before the match, then come play around in the back area. Since you're friends of mine, you don't have to hold back."

Hearing Tatsuya emphasize the words "play" and "friends" in his proposal, Erika and Leo exchanged a look before bursting into delighted laughter.

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As the hour of the opening ceremony drew near, the waiting room for every school became quite lively.

Based on the schedule, the last school would present many hours from now, but it was only natural for the students who came to attend the Thesis Competition to be highly interested in the subject regardless of whether they were the speakers on stage, the supporting cast, or simply just supporters from school.

Everywhere in the main hall, students could be seen chatting away with their peers from other schools.

Students were not the only ones who had surpassed their official affiliations when it came to communication.

Haruka came to the Thesis Competition not because of her job as First High's faculty member, but because of her work as an intelligence operative for Public Safety.

After the events in April, Public Safety became deeply interested in Tatsuya.

To be precise, the department within Public Safety that Haruka belonged to developed an interest in Tatsuya's background.

However, whenever they investigated the details around him, the higher ups would apply pressure on them.

Haruka didn't directly feel the heat, but she overheard her superior complain about it when she received her mission.

This only served to deepen her director's interest. Since they couldn't dispatch any official investigators, the mission was handed directly to Haruka.

Of course, Haruka resisted this. Back in April, Haruka tried her best to drive the point home that he wasn't an opponent who would fall for her traps, but naturally this was completely ignored. Thus, she fell into a situation where she was forced to continue despite her inadequacies when dealing with Tatsuya.

She was ordered to uncover Tatsuya's real identity, but experts had already gone over his personal data with a fine toothed comb and came up with "nothing to report".

Originally, her talents didn't lie in this direction. Even so, she had planned to use counseling to sound him out, only to make no progress whatsoever, which was only to be expected when her observation target never utilized the counseling services.

Thus, her inefficient plan of action that had no guarantee of success was to investigate his acquaintances, especially the contacts that were not from school.

The target of her investigation was currently preparing the presentation device in the room assigned to First High. She had no excuse to enter the room, but as stated earlier, Haruka wasn't adept at handling Tatsuya.

Stuck between her personal feelings and sense of duty, the result was Haruka adopting a passive stance holding a cup of coffee while maintaining her surveillance of the entrance from the main hall (also, disposable cans had vanished in this day and age as all containers had recycling as first priority).

Fortunately for this, this was not without progress. Shortly after her observation began, a female guest visited the room. From her age and appearance, she was no high school student. She wasn't even a college student.

She was probably her own age. Matching the face against her memories, that woman probably wasn't affiliated with the school.

But she had an impression of her from somewhere.

"......So it is her."

After referencing the picture taken by the anti-theft camera issued from Public Safety with the numbers, the image search verified whether she recalled incorrectly.

"The Electron Sorceress......"

In Haruka's high school days, she was an individual of considerable renown. Taking her gender into account, she may be called a heroine, but Haruka felt that the term hero would be more applicable......

The individual responsible for delivering the victory to Second High during the Nine Schools Competition — the Electron Sorceress.

For Haruka, who gave up on being a Magician from the moment she took the high school entrance examination, she was a young girl who aroused both envy and awe.

After graduating from the magic university, rumor had it that she joined the Defense ministry, but what was she doing visiting First High's room instead of her alma mater Second High?

Still, it wasn't like it was completely unnatural. There was nothing strange about wearing casual clothes on Sunday. Maybe she was here to recruit students who were about to graduate and didn't know that only the Shiba siblings were inside. Heck, maybe she came to see Miyuki.

However, Haruka's instincts told her that this woman was a clue to Tatsuya's background.

Not knowing that they were under such rigorous observation — no, maybe precisely because they were aware — the siblings were conversing with Fujibayashi, who dropped in to visit.

"Miyuki, long time no see. The last time we met face to face was at least half a year ago."

"Ah, the last time we met was in February, so it has been a long time indeed."

"I went to see the Nine Schools Competition too. We held a small get together in the room to welcome Tatsuya, wouldn't it have been better if Miyuki came along too?"

Saying this, Fujibayashi leveled a "why didn't you bring her" look at Tatsuya.

Nevertheless, if he was cowed by this he wouldn't be Tatsuya.

"Bringing Miyuki along would be too eye-catching."

Tatsuya's gaze swiftly added that catching too much attention would cause difficulties.

Miyuki was a tad embarrassed whereas Fujibayashi smiled with a helpless look on her face.

—Looks like he wasn't going to get an answer by beating around the bush.

"Speaking of which, Fujibayashi."

He didn't call her lieutenant because this was a normal public facility. Although he had already checked for bugs, he still couldn't let down his guard.

"Is it OK for you to visit First High's waiting room?"

For the uninitiated, this might seem like an incomprehensible statement, whereas those who were slightly in the loop might still interpret this incorrectly. People who only knew of Fujibayashi's exploits during her high school years would likely wonder "is it OK for the previous champion from Second High to have a friendly conversation in the waiting room of a rival school".

"No worries."

Of course, the people in question had no misconceptions.

"Times like these, having an official capacity helps a lot. As one of the technical officers attached to the Weapons Development Division of the Defense Department, there's nothing odd about visiting someone like you who exhibited a high degree of skill during the Nine Schools Competition."

"Just as it's natural for a member of the Fujibayashi Family, right?"

"Exactly. So Tatsuya-kun, feel free to call me 'Lieutenant Fujibayashi', 'Fujibayashi', or even 'Fujibayashi-nee', OK?"

"Uh, I think nee-san is going to be impossible."

Tatsuya smiled halfheartedly at Fujibayashi's mischievous joke. —Of the wry smile variety.

"Then, let's leave the greetings there...... I have good news and bad news, which one do you want to hear first?"

A familiar conversation began, Tatsuya thought, then allow me to respond to a classic question with a classic answer.

"Let's hear the good news first."

"......Don't people usually respond with 'let's hear the bad news first'?"

"Then let's hear the bad news first."

Seeing Tatsuya reply back while feigning ignorance, the normally stoic Fujibayashi sighed.

"......Forget it, it's OK. Let's start with the good news first. The Mobile Suit from beforehand has been completed. Captain Sanada said that they will be delivered tonight."

"Really...... As expected of him. Still, is it too late to run live tests tomorrow after returning to Tokyo......"

"Tomorrow, there will be a parade. Of course, in reality the captain wants to test this out as soon as possible, so he wanted to show off to you as soon as he could. The primary components were all furnished on your end, so at the very least he wants to bring out the assembled model in order to encourage himself. Yesterday, he even said something ridiculous like 'this way I can save face'."

"That's hardly ridiculous. The actual question was whether we could create something that could stand the rigors of live combat."

"I will convey your words to the captain. I believe he'll relax a lot more now."

Tatsuya chuckled wryly when Fujibayashi winked at him.

"Now...... for the bad news. No matter how we look at it, there's no way the earlier incident will just end there."

"Is there a problem?"

Tatsuya's face tightened, or more like his face became oddly solemn. By his side, Miyuki uneasily gazed at him.

This time, even Fujibayashi couldn't simply joke about it.

"The details are here."

She said as she handed a data card to Tatsuya.

Apparently, the contents were so classified they didn't want to send this over the wireless.

"Although I've added several layers of protection on my side...... There's still a chance this has already been leaked."

"Understood. We will make preparations on our end."

The siblings nodded in unison.

Seeing this, a trace of concern flashed across Fujibayashi's face, but she didn't forbid them to do so.

"We hope that nothing will happen, but...... If the worst case scenario does occur, we'll be relying on you."

No matter how much it hurt her, he was still an invaluable asset, so her position did not afford her the luxury of saying "stay out of it".

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The time was 8:45 AM. The audience stands were almost entirely filled.

After Tatsuya reviewed the information Fujibayashi passed him, Isori and Kanon came in.

"Shiba-kun, time to switch."

They changed the guard every time a presentation finished, with the order already prearranged. Isori was very interested in the second topic "development of magic assistance devices capable of molecular rearrangement" presented by Fourth High, so he volunteered to keep watch during the first presentation.

Tatsuya felt that there was no need to pay extra heed to the sequential order since there was a screen in the waiting room, but he still acquiesced to Isori's proposal.

"It's all yours."

Concisely handing over his responsibility, Tatsuya headed to the stands with Miyuki.

—But.

The two of them came to a halt in the main hall.

"Shiba-san."

Miyuki was the one who was addressed.

The voice came from a young man, or maybe a teenager was more appropriate. The voice was slightly uneasy, probably caused by his heightened anxiety. The face belonged to someone whom the siblings hadn't seen for two months.

"Ichijou-san."

Ichijou Masaki had called out to Miyuki.

He wore a "security" wristband on his left arm. Rather than being one of the supporting cast from Third High, he appeared to be serving in the security detail composed of students from all nine schools that was headed by Katsuto during the Thesis Competition. This turnout was likely because he saw Miyuki while executing his mission of patrolling the premises.

"Long time no see, Shiba-san. I believe the last time was during the evening ball."

"......Ah, likewise, long time no see."

This natural yet unnatural pause was caused by a cognitive dissonance because Masaki saw Miyuki as his dance partner during the ball, while Miyuki viewed Masaki as her brother's opponent during the Newcomer's Division.

In order to cover this, or muddle the waters, Miyuki bowed with extreme politeness.

"Ah, no, me too......"

This flawless etiquette rattled Masaki even though he was more accustomed to moving through higher social circles than Tatsuya. The young man (probably another member of the security team who was Masaki's partner) also stood there mesmerized. Miyuki's devious plan worked perfectly.

"Are you patrolling the area?"

It was only now that Miyuki smiled and asked the rhetorical question.

"Y-Yes, indeed."

Isn't it a sign of immaturity to be shaken so easily? Tatsuya thought but changed his mind upon reflecting that when the opponent was Miyuki, such a result was inevitable.

Even he, who was closer to her than anyone else and had his mind reforged, sometimes forgot himself while watching her. Thus, it was unsurprising that this outsider who stood in such close proximity to the fairest one would be overly conscious of Miyuki's presence.

Miyuki was not privy to her brother's ruminations. Her interest was roused and her mood excellent.

"Since Ichijou-san is giving this his all, I think we can safely relax. We'll be in your care."

True, it was heartening to know that the "Crimson Prince" was part of security. However, Tatsuya's thoughts were purely an objective assessment. —Still, isn't this laying it on a little thick?

"Yes! I will do my utmost to live up to your expectations!"

Completely nonchalant, Tatsuya wondered whether Masaki could make it through the day.

"Good luck to you too, Tomitsuka-kun."

"Ah...... Thank you for your encouragement."

Masaki's companion who had been left alone to one side dizzily replied back in a tone that was a little too stiff to be addressed to someone in the same year.

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Although they didn't need to be as uptight as security, after Erika accepted the job on the spot, objectively speaking she had no intentions of backing down.

After regrouping with Mikihiko since they missed him while taking Tatsuya and company to the waiting room and reuniting with Mizuki, who had sent word ahead of time she would be late, they sat down in four seats in the audience stands. Erika paid extra heed to "easy observation areas" as well as "suspicious individuals".

Her efforts were not in vain. In one of the rear corners of the audience stands, she found a familiar figure.

Speaking of familiar, it was more like she couldn't forget even if she tried. This was a face that she used to see every day, and even with their schedule clashes nowadays, they still saw each other once every two days or so.

The other person also noticed Erika. No, maybe the other person noticed Erika even sooner. While this wasn't anything surprising after taking the other person's ability into consideration, this still irked Erika to no end.

"Eh? Erika, over there is......"

Mikihiko caught on as well.

Again, it wasn't weird that he would recognize that person either.

"Erika-chan, is that someone you know?"

"Just a Casanova wannabe. He's probably waiting for a woman right now."

Before her compatriots in the adjacent seats could turn this into a conversation, Erika opted to behave as if she didn't know that person.

Well aware of Erika's rocky relationship with Toshikazu (well, one-sided on Erika's part), Mikihiko avoided rocking the boat and shifted his gaze as Leo, insensitive to the currents, was about to ask him to clarify.

"Miyuki, do you know Tomitsuka Hagane?"

"Ah, he's from the neighboring class, so I only know his name and face. Does Onii-sama know him?"

After finding an empty seat, the siblings' conversation drifted not towards their rare guest Masaki, but to the reticent Tomitsuka Hagane.

—This must be what people refer to as unrequited passions.

"Tomitsuka is one of Sawaki-senpai's subordinates. In addition, the Tomitsuka Family's 'Range Zero' is quite famous."

The Tomitsuka Family dominated one area within the Hundred Families.

Even people without Tatsuya's encyclopedic knowledge knew of the heresy incidents caused by Magicians of that family.

"What are you guys talking about?"

Suddenly, Erika joined in after arriving from the audience stands.

"Erika, are you alone? Where's Leo?"

The two of them were just together, thus prompting Tatsuya's question.

Yet, displeasure colored Erika's face.

"......Tatsuya-kun. I'd like to take this opportunity to make something perfectly clear."

Erika wasn't the sort to do something outrageous like throw a fit with so many witnesses around, but her commanding tone was charismatic in its own right.

"Can you stop lumping me together with that? I only taught him a few tricks and gave him a weapon, beyond that there's nothing going on."

"That's not what I meant......"

Despite the misunderstanding, Tatsuya was not an "honest guy", but this time he was being earnest. He truly meant nothing by his words.

Speaking of which, wasn't this overreaction a hint that she hadn't discerned this was an issue? Tatsuya turned that thought over in his head, but wasn't evil enough to verbalize it.

"Where's everyone else?"

Since the triumph during the Nine Schools Competition, their peers from Year 1 Class E had expressed great interest and all claimed that "We're all coming to cheer you on~!" or something like that, so everyone from class planned on showing up.

"Our classmates shouldn't have arrived yet, right? That's probably because they know we're set to go onstage in the afternoon. Ah, but Mizuki and Miki are here in the front row. There's a lot of chemistry going on there."

Erika chuckled mischievously as she sat next to Tatsuya.

So she disliked talking about her own business, but was quite intrigued when talking about others.

In this regard, Erika was a perfectly normal young girl, Tatsuya thought.

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It was 9 AM. The National High School Magic Thesis Competition kicked off with a solemn but not pompous atmosphere. Even with assistance from the military, but when compared to the student events during the Nine Schools Competition, the Thesis Competition was highly valued by universities, corporations, and research institutions. A properly handled introduction might even lead to an individual's career path (from a headhunting perspective). Taking into the account the magic knowledge being bandied around, this sort of scale at the event was perfectly understandable.

After going through the forms for the keynote speech, the introduction for the first presentation, Second High's "Usage of Convergence-Type Magic to Observe and Utilize Dark Matter" began.

Now that the Thesis Competition officially began, the hustle and bustle of the main hall died down.

Uninterested in magic technology, Haruka opted to take a break at the cafe to alleviate her boredom.

Just as she was about to do so.

"Ono-sensei."

A familiar voice called out from near the main entrance.

"Asuka-sensei."

As the school counselor responsible for the mental well being of First High's students, Haruka naturally shared a close relationship with Asuka, who headed the infirmary responsible for physical injuries, although their relationship had not progressed to "friends in private".

"Did Ono-sensei also come to see the thesis presentations? I thought you said you weren't very interested."

This comment might be too fiery depending on tone, but Asuka's amicable tone caused Haruka to suspect "Did I ever say that?". With Asuka's easily approachable personality, she was almost better suited to be a counselor than herself, Haruka thought enviously.

"No, there's just a few things on my mind...... Compared to that, Asuka-sensei, why are you here? Are you here with this child?"

Haruka was correct in that Asuka wasn't alone. By her side, there was a young girl out of uniform who was obviously a high school student. While she had some inkling, she didn't appear to be one of Haruka's students.

"Indeed. Hirakawa-chan said she wanted to watch today's presentations. Although she's recovered from her illness, her physical body is still a little frail, so I tagged along."

While these words smacked of blatant VIP treatment, but once she heard the name Hirakawa, Haruka immediately recalled where she heard this name. While she had no part in handling the attempted data theft, Haruka still had to make her report to the division of Public Safety she belonged to, so she was familiar with the overall situation.

Stimulating her with the success of fellow high school students, helping to provide her with life goals and ultimately changing her mentality was perfectly logical from a psychological standpoint.

"Is that so. Keep up the good work."

Haruka frankly spoke words of encouragement to Asuka.

After taking a small detour, Haruka arrived at the cafe on schedule.

Strictly speaking, a customer that nursed one cup of coffee for 20 minutes wasn't a good customer for this cafe.

She could just whittle away the time here until her day's work was done. Although she wanted to think that way, the world wasn't as easy as one's imagination. More like, society's trials (?) demanded much of her.

"May I borrow a bit of your time?"

Haruka's heart almost stopped when someone reached out to her.

As if to fill the loss of time, the next instant her heart started beating violently.

—Maybe this was a misconception, but her shock had truly upset her heartrate and breathing patterns.

The one who spoke to Haruka was Fujibayashi.

"Eh...... Ah, please."

"Thank you."

Gracefully sitting down, she ordered a cup of red tea from the waitress who swiftly appeared with a gentle voice.

In comparison to Fujibayashi's coolness, Haruka could not contain her anxiety.

That was hardly her fault.

Her observation target suddenly directly initiated a conversation with her.

Though Haruka was frantic enough to spit fire, since she was unable to discern the other person's motives, she could only sit and watch in silence as Fujibayashi took a sip from the red tea that the waitress brought and let out a deep breath.

"......It is a little embarrassing to be watched like that."

Faltering, Haruka only noticed that she was staring at Fujibayashi when the other person pointed it out to her.

"S-Sorry."

Her shame and wavering continued to grow, but Fujibayashi's next words allowed Haruka's heart to immediately calm down.

"That's fine. It is my honor to be held in such high esteem by the 'Phantom Lady'."

"......I believe it is my honor for someone like me to dwell in the memory of the 'Electron Sorceress'."

Despite the heightened wariness in her tone, this degree of change was unavoidable given the circumstances.

The title Fujibayashi spoke of — "Phantom Lady" was nowhere near as famous as Fujibayashi's alias, the "Electron Sorceress". This name was only familiar to intelligence operatives when discussing the unidentified female spy who bore that name.

The fact that her identity as the "Phantom Lady" was exposed was more than sufficient to push Haruka to the brink.

Given that she was able to carelessly drop such an incredible secret, then on the flip side, her "demand" was likely to be heavy as well.

"So, what is it?"

Seeing a determined expression usurp her previously faltering form, Fujibayashi smiled in satisfaction.

"I think you know very well without me going into detail, correct?"

"......My sincere apologies, but I'm not as gifted as you are."

In reality, Fujibayashi's words were spot on as Haruka had already surmised her opponent's demands.

It was just that if she said "I understand" and nodded her head — this would be the same as raising the white flag.

"You're too humble. You graduated from college and graduate school with outstanding grades. Even Kokonoe-sensei gave you high marks."

Haruka mentally clucked her tongue.

The Fujibayashi Family was famous for their Ancient Magic users. Thus, it came as no surprise that they shared a close relationship with Kokonoe Yakumo, arguably one of the authorities on Ancient Magic.

On the other hand, Haruka and Fujibayashi's first meeting was today at this minute.

The trump cards she prepared were utterly useless.

"......I don't plan on making any demands that will put you in a difficult position."

This was not Fujibayashi backing down. This was a mental salvo in the form of her flaunting her superior position.

"I just want to propose that the two of us avoid encroaching on the other's territory. That's all."

Technically speaking, this comment held no information whatsoever, but was a profound demand that left no room for misinterpretation.

"......I don't entirely get your drift."

Actually, Haruka got the gist of Fujibayashi's proposal, just as Fujibayashi's request fell in line with her own speculation. In other words, Fujibayashi wanted Haruka to halt any investigation towards Fujibayashi's military activities.

On the other side, Fujibayashi clearly understood that Haruka comprehended the meaning of her request.

"Do you want me to repeat myself clearly once more?"

With a relaxed expression, Fujibayashi watched the fuming Haruka clench her teeth.

This vixen! Even if she continued to glare at her, right now Haruka could only bray like a whipped dog.

"Don't worry. Your superiors won't prosecute your responsibilities."

In other words, she had already made her move against Haruka's higher ups.

Fujibayashi lightly rose to her feet and handed her check to Haruka.

She could plainly pay for her bill at the table and it was doubly irritating to walk over to the front counter.

Haruka and Fujibayashi's first encounter ended in Haruka's complete and utter defeat.

(......Still, it's not like I got nothing out of this!)

At the very least, there definitely existed an unspeakable secret between Shiba Tatsuya and Fujibayashi Kyouko.

This was the only thing made painfully clear.

Haruka failed to discover her own mulishness as she vowed to avenge herself for this slight.

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As the main lead for First High's performance, Suzune arrived at the conference hall just after 11 AM, which was an hour earlier than expected.

This was after the third presentation, Fifth High's grandiose "The Control of Plate Tectonics and Gradual Extraction of Tectonic Force". Tatsuya was in the waiting room to welcome Suzune, Mayumi, and Mari.

"I came early~."

Mayumi's voice prompted people to question exactly how old she was, but how was he supposed to respond to that, Tatsuya thought as he fell into a reverie.

"What is it?"

"Nothing really...... Is there a reason why you came ahead of schedule?"

Neither Mari nor Suzune took exception, so any sign of exhaustion on his part would be his loss. Injecting fresh enthusiasm into himself with those words, Tatsuya reinvigorated himself and asked this question.

(Speaking of which, Miyuki had already decided to see no evil, speak no evil, hear no evil.)

Tardiness would be a huge problem, but there was no problem in getting here early.

The waiting room designed to accommodate presentation devices had sufficient room for the Shiba siblings as well as several upperclassmen with professional grade skills prowling around. Even with three extra female students in the mix, the place wasn't cramped.

"The interrogation ended earlier than expected."

Still, this nominally unimportant question provoked a response from Mari that could not be ignored.

"Another interrogation? And on this day in particular?"

There was no need to ask who was being interrogated. He was present when Sekimoto was arrested, though to be brutally honest about his clandestine activities, he had illegally recorded evidence that time.

Still, there was only that one time.

Of course, that wasn't the only time he saw Sekimoto. He was also there when they went to interrogate the first time.

After Lu Gonghu's assault, Sekimoto had devolved into panic. Since Mari maintained that this was not caused by her magic, the only possible cause would be that he realized his life was on the line. There was no way that Sekimoto would be unaware that the latest attack aimed to silence him.

Hence dedicated government officials were conducting a thorough investigation surrounding Sekimoto.

"We really should have finished yesterday......"

"It was difficult to get permission in the first place...... And I can't just throw the family name around like that."

That's true, Tatsuya thought. Given that he wasn't part of a criminal organization, it was extremely difficult to receive permission to interrogate individuals deemed as invalids.

"But why today? Couldn't you continue tomorrow?"

"Such an optimistic outlook doesn't fit your personality."

Tatsuya's natural question was subjected to Mari's correction for some reason.

"Sekimoto and Hirakawa's sister targeted the data for the Thesis Competition, though that does not appear to be their only objective. No matter how you put it, since they took aim at the data, then there is a definite possibility that the organization using them as cat's paws will act during the competition itself."

"Ha. There is that possibility."

This was within Tatsuya's calculations. However, even if they had intel on the organization lurking in the shadows, they still didn't have time to prepare countermeasures. Without an emergency response task force on standby, even the regular army of a monarchy would find it impossible to mobilize on a moment's notice.

In regards to competition security, they had already done everything they could to prepare for emergencies by having Katsuto lead the group. Since Sekimoto wasn't privy to the details of the assault, interrogating him should not be a high priority.

Regardless, pointing out these details was not in Tatsuya's job description.

"Indeed. Since there is that possibility, we cannot ignore it. After all, the more intel the better."

In today's case, when compared to mostly unusable intel, Suzune's presentation stood at a much higher priority. In any case, since this was all in the past, there was no need to quibble over the details.

"I see. So did you find out anything new?"

"Yeah. After verifying once more, Sekimoto had traces of mental manipulation."

"......No wonder."

Regardless of the utility of this piece of information, its contents were sufficient to astonish Tatsuya.

"Why wasn't this detected during the psychological screening?"

Ever since Sayaka had been magically manipulated into leading terrorists from "Blanche" onto campus in spring, the students of First High were required to undergo scheduled psychological evaluations.

For prospective Magicians who were to be the pillars of public safety and national defense, being brainwashed into serving foreign powers was no joke at all. For the school administrators and the government organizations responsible, this was a malicious nightmare that ultimately voided any concept of "student privacy".

With the discovery of another victim of mental manipulation, this measure appeared to be redundant. After all, why were they going through psychological evaluations in the first place now?

"The psychological evaluation is held at the beginning of each month. There is a high probability that Sekimoto was ensnared after that."

"Nicely executed...... Was it medicinal?"

"That remains unclear. Neither myself nor Mayumi are experts in that field."

Although Tatsuya thought "Is that so?" in regards to Mari's answer, he refrained from commenting further.

"The psychologist didn't say, but this definitely was not done through normal means. Maybe this is the real 'Evil Eye'."

Mayumi's opinion was more or less deeper than Mari's comment.

"So they sent a natural Outer-Systematic Magician......"

Unlike the "Evil Eye" developed by Russia before the formation of the New Soviet Union and passed on to separatist terrorist cells, Magicians who could naturally wield mental interference Outer-Systematic Magic had the power to completely rewrite someone's personality. These wielders of the "True Evil Eye" could completely change a person's activities in a short period of time while the victim and other people were still in the dark.

"Hm, no matter how strong the mental interference magic is, successful imprinting is largely impossible without conforming to the target's subconsciousness."

This was just like hypnosis. On the surface, human consciousness appeared to be easily malleable, but was actually incredibly resilient.

Manipulating unspecified emotions and impulses were another story, but the sort of magic that interfered with established physical behavior — trying to interfere with the conscious mind and manipulate voluntary decisions was incredibly challenging.

"From the very start, Sekimoto disagreed with this country's way of handling magic behind closed doors. He believed that all Magic Sequences and Activation Sequences across the globe should be shared publicly and that this was the only way for magic to achieve true evolution. In summation, he's a proponent of open resourcing."

Hearing Mayumi's explanation, Mari added a few bitter words of her own.

"That may be true from a scholarly standpoint, but given that international hostility still exists in reality, I am hard pressed to say that he is correct."

Mayumi's voice expressed a trace of compassion.

"Rather, that is undeniably the wrong position."

Tatsuya decisively came to that conclusion. At least for him, theories that did not jibe with reality had no purpose whatsoever.

"......How stringent, Tatsuya-kun."

"......At any rate, they found an opening through Sekimoto's ideals. Then, they planted the powerful conception that it was the duty of magically progressive nations to pass on their advanced research to magically underdeveloped nations."

"Underdeveloped countries refer to who?"

Mari's did not have an optimistic answer for Tatsuya's question.

"We didn't get that out of him. He didn't appear to know."

"......So a lock was placed on his consciousness."

I see, so that's how they realized he was being mentally controlled, Tatsuya speculated.

"So that's why the next step has gone beyond our initial projections."

Mari's voice was tinged with anxiety that mirrored the concern in Mayumi's tone.

"There is a chance that hostile action beyond our imagination will occur. Hanzou-kun asked me to pass the message to everyone. Rin-chan, go finish your task. We'll be here and will keep a careful eye on the conference hall. Tatsuya-kun, please be careful as well."

"I will."

Though Tatsuya never let down his guard after receiving Fujibayashi's advice, he honestly accepted others' concerns on his behalf.

While Tatsuya and company were discussing their decidedly not peaceful topic, Suzune continued to edit her draft without batting an eyelid.

In the communications room within the same building, Fujibayashi used a special trick to receive a vitally important piece of information. She was busily looking for an empty room when she received the emergency summons and received the incoming transmission across the information dimension that ran no risk of being overheard.

"Lu Gonghu escaped? My apologies, but is this information accurate?"

"I know you don't want to believe this, but it's true."

Kazama's voice came down the other line in a completely serious tone. Also, it wasn't in Kazama to crack such a joke in poor taste.

"The transport was attacked in transit to Yokohama. There were no survivors."

"Which means that Lu Gonghu's corpse was not at the site...... Speaking of which, why did they select today to move him?"

"The so-called Thesis Competition should only be an event at the high school level."

"My sincere apologies!"

Hearing Kazama's logical response, Fujibayashi finally realized that she was unconsciously grumbling to her superior and immediately apologized.

"Still, you have a point on why today was chosen specifically to transport the prisoner."

Naturally, Kazama wasn't the sort of person to care about these tiny scruples.

"There must be a reason why the enemy chose today to launch their rescue mission. We must take that possibility into account."

As combat personnel, Kazama had served as a front line commander since the very beginning, so he valued practicality much more than others.

"Fortunately, we've already made preparations to test out the new equipment at Tsuchiya tomorrow. Leaving for your position effective immediately, our ETA is around 1500 hours."

"Understood. I will take heed of the local conditions."

"Thank you, lieutenant."

After receiving Kazama's orders, Fujibayashi saluted even though she knew that he couldn't see her due to their method of communication.

In regards to the changes in the mission parameters handed down by Mayumi, Hattori grabbed Kirihara to report the alterations and interrogation results to Katsuto (Sayaka and Erika had left for lunch at this point).

"I see. Kirihara and Hattori, form up and patrol the outer perimeter."

"Understood!"

Coincidentally, Katsuto shared a table with them during lunch as they dined on simply packed sandwiches. After listening to Hattori's report, he handed out new orders without hesitation.

Normally, that would have been all there was to it because Katsuto rarely asked for input from underclassmen.

"Hattori, Kirihara. Based on the current situation, do you get the feeling that something's awry?"

Yet today, Katsuto broke form and asked.

"Something's awry?"

Kirihara glanced at Hattori, who wore a look of bemusement as he opened his mouth.

"......Even taking into account Yokohama's unique features, there are too many foreigners around."

Since he wasn't born in Yokohama and was unfamiliar with the area, Hattori diligently inspected the conference hall surroundings in the previous two weeks. Compared to that time, Hattori felt that there was a noticeable spike in the number of foreigners around.

"So Hattori also thinks so."

"Yes. Does Juumonji-senpai concur?"

"Hm. What do you think, Kirihara?"

"Sorry. I didn't notice anything about the foreigners, but......"

"Go ahead."

"Yes. It's just that, compared to the conference hall, the aura along the streets is oddly filled with killing intent."

"Hm...... Indeed."

Katsuto nodded and fell into thought. Though it was no more than 10 seconds, both Hattori and Kirihara felt that Katsuto's silence lasted more than ten minutes.

The atmosphere was very heavy.

"Hattori, Kirihara. Put on Kevlar for your afternoon patrols."

The two of them stared wide-eyed at Katsuto's face.

Despite the rudeness of their stare, Katsuto didn't mind in the slightest as he picked up the short range wireless communicator.

He issued the same order to all security personnel that he just gave to the two of them.

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The introduction for the afternoon presentations was set for 1 PM.

First High would get the stage at 3 PM. There were less than two hours until their presentation.

After switching the guard before noon, Tatsuya and Isori were discussing the last minute details.

They were each accompanied by one person.

Tatsuya had Miyuki whereas Isori had Kanon.

The industrious "workers" before noon had vanished at this point.

In order to avoid distracting Suzune, Mayumi and Mari gravitated towards the door.

Over there, someone knocked lightly on the door.

Mayumi carefully opened the door to find the young girl who was even shorter than she was that was to succeed her.

"Ara, A-chan. Can you leave your place now?"

Mayumi whispered quietly because Azusa was selected as one of the student judges.

There was no panel of judges for the National High School Magic Thesis Competition. Since there were great alterations in the crowd during each presentation, it was too difficult to ask the crowd to make an assessment.

This wasn't something they could say as representatives, but other than the professional assessors, each school also sent one student as a judge to help analyze presentations from other schools.

This judge position was traditionally filled by each school's Student Council President. First High was no exception, so Azusa had started her task in the early hours of the morning.

"The first group in the afternoon finished early, so I wanted to check in on everyone."

"So you came to encourage us. Thank you, Nakajou."

"Ah, you're welcome...... Sorry, Suzune. I hope I'm not distracting you."

Even though she kept her voice down, since Suzune was in the room, Azusa's already petite body shrank even further (atmosphere-wise).

"Who's in the lead right now?"

Isori turned and joined the conversation. The conversation was cut short in the middle, but not because Isori looked down on Tatsuya. —If that was the case, he might have suffered a blizzard when he entered the waiting room.

"It's Fourth High, as expected. This year, they brought another device that took a lot of time and effort."

Azusa's assessment caused Isori to tilt his head slightly.

"Don't you think they're a little too vainglorious?"

Fourth High presented second before the noon break and was the school that Isori was most worried about.

"Still, it was amazing they were able to create a system that could flawlessly combine magic. ......Ah, sorry, it's about time for the next presentation. Good luck everyone."

Given that she never forgot her original objective even at the very end, Azusa should be doing a fine job as the Student Council President. Probably.

In the audience stands, a select group of people sat together.

Highly motivated, Erika and Leo sat there with their weapons along with Honoka and Shizuku, who had joined them during lunch, as they eagerly waited for Tatsuya's group to appear.

"Mikihiko...... How is it?"

Although they were waiting patiently, they weren't just twiddling their thumbs.

"Nothing out of the ordinary yet."

After using Sensory Synchronization to receive local intelligence from the spirits he sent out, Mikihiko responded to Leo's whispered question.

"Mizuki?"

"No sign of anything strange."

Mizuki shook her head at Erika's concise question.

Mizuki replaced the glasses she took off earlier.

They were preparing for the "enemy" that was not in the audience and might or might not arrive.

After being checkmated by Fujibayashi and unable to continue her assignment, Haruka could just have departed from the premises, but that would have seemed like she was fleeing from the field. This mentality caused Haruka to remain in the main hall and subconsciously monitor the crowd.

"Ono-sensei."

Suddenly, someone called out to her from behind.

"Tsudzura-sensei?"

Turning around, she found the lead adviser for First High's representative team standing there with a long time no see expression.

"Why are you waiting here? Is something the matter?"

"No, not really...... I was just taking a break. Tsudzura-sensei, why are you here?"

Haruka's question prompted a mixed smile to appear on Tsudzura's face.

"There's no need for yours truly to appear today. We have a fine team of representatives this year."

This guy actually referred to himself as "yours truly"...... Even taking that into account, Haruka involuntarily acknowledged his "excellence".

"Still...... I have this irritating premonition."

Hearing him say that in an unambiguous tone caused Haruka to grow a little anxious.

Tsudzura was a magic researcher and Magician who obtained his position as an assistant professor at the magic university at a young age.

His expertise lay in magic geometry and he was especially famous for a theory known as Polyhedron Magic.

It was a theory that viewed macro phenomena as simply a combination of triangular pyramids and quadratic prisms and used the motions of these multiple polyhedrons to grasp the changes in phenomena. Using magic that manipulated multiple imaginary polyhedrons to alter the Eidos was one of the paths in modern magic theory.

However, Polyhedron Magic theory's utility as a stepping stone to solving deficiencies in modern magic like partial phenomena changes had been overshadowed by its potential to predict the future.

By using a recognition system to capture the entire world seen as three dimensional objects along with the myriad interactions between these objects in the world, the caster could view the various interactions through an abstract, three dimensional projection. This abstract model for viewing the world allowed a certain degree of data manipulation to project the future to be somewhat facile.

As the young authority on Polyhedron Magic, Tsudzura's "premonition" was on a certain level closer to a "prediction".

"......That being said, I do have a premonition that the worst will not come to pass."

Although the last comment seemed to be tacked on, Haruka earnestly prayed that he was not just saying that to comfort her.

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It was three in the afternoon. The presentation from First High's representatives went off on schedule.

While Third High's Kichijouji Shinkurou, the discoverer of the "Cardinal Code", was the main draw of the Thesis Competition, First High's topic regarding one of the three Great Puzzles of Gravity-Type Magic "Gravity Control-Type Thermonuclear Reactor" also received a lot of attention. In the main hall, besides the students and faculty from First High, many individuals affiliated with the magic university and civilian research organizations had gathered there. The audience rested their expectant gazes on the podium.

There, a large device sat on the stage bathed in natural light while Suzune spoke through the international conference hall's speaker system with a clear and calm voice.

Next to her, Isori was manipulating the model device and Tatsuya was on stage switching the CAD displays and Activation Sequences.

"......Is the actualization of thermonuclear power a necessity? This question has already been answered in the previous century."

Suzune stood next to a gigantic glass ball.

Tatsuya toggled the Activation Sequence for Release-Type Magic.

The instant Suzune touched the control panel on the CAD, the deuterium gas sealed within the globe ionized and reacted with the coloring painted on the inside of the globe to emit a dazzling light.

This magnificent display caused a small ruckus to break out in the crowd.

"First of all, there is the time needed for the deuterium serving as fuel to ionize as well as the ability to maintain the situation. Both of these issues can be solved through Release-Type Magic."

Still, this phenomenon has been proved in previous experiments so it was a little lacking in originality.

"The primary obstacle for thermonuclear power is the time created because the ionized electrons possess electric repulsion that prevents fusion chemical reactions, or simply the problem caused by the interaction of the electrons."

The flashing globe dimmed and a large screen descended from the center of the stage.

"Our predecessors attempted to achieve thermonuclear power without magic by applying overwhelming pressure to overcome electric repulsion."

The screen displayed images from the previous century's experiments and various models and charts.

"However, regardless of whether they used ultra-high temperatures or surface compression to increase pressure, they never managed to create a stable thermonuclear reaction. This was because of a multitude of reasons such as the container's durability and fuel resupply. Even if the thermonuclear reaction itself could be sustained, there are examples where the energy output is so tremendous that it became unwieldy. Still, all the problems can be narrowed down to the fact that the electron repulsion forces require too much resources to be feasible."

The silver screen rose.

Behind the screen, two large cylindrical magnets stood there, each with four cords attached between them to form a basic experimental device.

Isori raised one of the cylinders — although it looked like he was using his hands to pull them, he actually used magic — and let go of his hands.

The vigorously waving magnets were repelled by the magnetic force before they could make contact.

"This should be plainly obvious without an explanation, but the electron repulsion force will be magnified the closer the objects are to one another. Objects with strong Coulombic force will increase the repulsion force as they draw closer, so contact will be avoided."

Suzune silently stood by the repeatedly shaking device and wore earplugs to protect her ears from the cacophony while her hands remained on the control panel.

Immediately, a sound similar to repeated banging on a large gong reverberated across the conference hall.

Suzune took her hands off and the two magnets silently returned to stillness.

"However, electron repulsion force can be reduced with magic.

Here, we successfully developed a Magic Sequence that can reduce the Coulomb's force to 1/10000 within a brief period of time."

Suzune did not raise her voice.

Nevertheless, her words caused the audience to break into a furor.

As if to signal for quiet, the primary model slowly rose from the stage.

If asked to describe it, the model looked like a piston forged from transparent materials.

A modified piston connected to a flywheel and crank handle was inserted into the large, transparent cylinder. There were two valves at the top of the cylinder. From there, a transparent tube was inserted that was connected to a sink filled with clear water.

"This device takes into account the dangers of radiation, so we used hydrogen instead of deuterium gas. Release-Type Magic is used to ionize the hydrogen gas within the canister while Gravity Control-Type Magic and Coulomb's force resistance magic are activated at the same time. The ionized electrons have their repulsion force lowered by the Coulomb Force Resistance Magic and are gathered by the Gravity Control-Type Magic in the center, thus triggering a thermonuclear reaction. This device requires approximately 0.1 seconds to achieve a thermonuclear reaction. As you know, a thermonuclear reaction will not continue indefinitely on its own. If impetus is not supplied externally, the reaction quickly grinds to a halt. Our school's Gravity Control-Type Thermonuclear Fusion Reactor proactively makes use of this element. Once the reaction stops, Oscillation-Type Magic is used to cool the Deuterium gas to levels that the container can withstand. The heat energy recovered will serve as fuel for Gravity-Control Type and Coulomb Force Resistant Magic. Drawn by the gravitational field generated by the Gravity Control-Type Magic, the inertia of the piston continuously rises and sends the cooled Deuterium gas into the heat sink......"

While Suzune was delivering her explanation, Isori operated the control panel for the demonstration device. Ionization, Coulomb Force Control, Gravity Control-Type, cooling, energy recovery, ionization, Coulomb Force Control, Gravity Control-Type...... Isori regularly activated this chain of magics several dozen times in a row just like that.

"Currently, a highly skilled Magician is required to operate this device for sustained operation. However, if a device highly efficient in energy recovery could be used, I believe that a Gravity Control-Type Thermonuclear Reactor that only needs a Magician to jump start the device can become a reality."

The second Suzune's voice stopped speaking, the conference hall was filled with thunderous applause.

The reason why Gravity Control-Type Thermonuclear Reactors were thought to be impossible was because the target of the Gravity Control-Type Magic, the elements in the nuclear reaction, are constantly diminishing. In addition, since Gravity-Control Type Magic is directed towards a quantitative value, the lowered value of the elements would cause the magic to fizzle under the mistaken impression that the "target does not exist". Hence a nuclear explosion is possible, but sustained nuclear reactions were held to be impossible.

Now, with the addition of Coulomb Force Resistance Magic, Gravity Control-Type Magic was no longer as integral as before. This way, there no longer needed to be a continuous nuclear reaction, but instead they borrowed a leaf from the new technique "Loop Cast" to ignite multiple nuclear reactions. The praise from the audience below unanimously declared this to be an incredible idea.

Thirty minutes were allotted for each presentation during the Thesis Competition with ten minutes in between.

The previous team employed these ten minutes to help gather their materials and devices so that the next team could come on stage.

Compared to the presentation itself, the representatives and support personnel from each school felt that the break time in between was the busiest part.

Tatsuya was just about to dismantle the control device used during the presentation when the next team's operator (the assistant who had the same job as Tatsuya) came forth to setup their equipment.

"Nicely done. Allow me to congratulate you on a fine performance."

Initially, Tatsuya wasn't aware that this comment was directed to him because there was practically no time to converse.

Still, based on the direction of the voice, the target must be him. With that in mind, he raised his head to find Kichijouji Shinkurou smiling fearlessly at him.

"Should I say thank you here?"

"Don't worry about it, I wasn't expecting anything in return anyways."

Pah, Tatsuya closed the lid on the case and hefted the control panel that was about the size of the electron synthesizer on the table. Kichijouji set down a similar case carrying a control panel in the same place.

There were connections at both ends of the stage to allow ease of access from both sides, so was there a reason why he specifically chose the same side as Tatsuya?

"Gravity Control-Type Magic is a vital component in Flying-Type Magic and Coulomb Force Control Magic is a refined edition of ionization convergence magic developed by the previous Sirius, William Sirius. Compared to those, the fluidity of that 'Loop Cast' was astonishing."

"Your keen eye is truly terrifying. As expected of Cardinal George."

As Tatsuya was speaking, Kichijouji's hands were busy setting up his equipment.

Tatsuya was the only student from First High left on stage.

He was just about to leave the stage, holding the rectangular case as he walked towards the backstage.

"However, we're not going to lose. In fact, we're going to beat you this time."

A voice called out behind him.

That sounded a little childish, but it didn't seem malicious.

How should he make a witty comeback, Tatsuya thought as he stopped to turn around.

Just then, a colossal boom and vibration sent the entire hall shaking.

Chapter 10

The current time was 3:30 PM on October 30th, 2095 AD.

Future generations would refer to this turning point as the "Scorched Halloween". The "Yokohama Incident" that instigated this event began at this moment.

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After First High's presentation ended, Fujibayashi struck up an idle conversation with Toshikazu in the main hall — they had been together since the morning, so they were almost running out of topics — when suddenly his brow twitched and he broke off.

The terminal reserved for messaging (a security device with no data storage capabilities and strictly reserved for powerful signal broadcast) in his breast pocket was vibrating.

Sending an apologetic look towards Fujibayashi, he turned around to pick up the phone.

"This is Chiba, is it Inagaki? What!? ......Understood, I'm on my way."

Inspector Chiba turned around to find Fujibayashi also finishing her phone call.

"I need to head to the scene."

"I will remain here."

Neither of them asked whether the other person received the same communication they did. Taking it on faith that they were on accord, there was no feeling of incompatibility.

"Sorry! Contact me later if anything comes up."

Fujibayashi nodded and didn't waste her breath as Toshikazu fairly flew towards his car with magic fueling his sprint. —His feet appeared to be moving faster.

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"What's the situation!?"

Three minutes after receiving the transmission, Toshikazu roared into the phone slotted in the car for more information as he sped towards the scene.

"The exploding car that plowed into the control building is still burning. There are no follow up suicide attacks."

On the other side of the receiver came a much more composed report.

Even so, the contents of the message were not relaxing.

The target was the Harbor Control Building near Hillside Harbor.

The sturdy construction material itself was able to repel the heat and force from the explosion so there was no need to worry on that account. However, the staff members were all civilians and must be paralyzed into inaction after being on the receiving end of a terrorist attack. In the meantime, while the staff were evacuating and before harbor security could take over, there would be a massive surveillance hole over the harbor proper.

(Too reliant on bureaucracy!)

Owing to resistance from politicians who were hostile to the expansion of organizations such as national defense and police, harbor control and airport control were all relegated to civilian control. Harbors for island nations are synonymous to the national border, so if they hated handing things over to the army, at least there should have been armed police on station. This was something that the Chiba Family, including Toshikazu, had proposed long before.

"The cargo ship moored in the harbor has fired rockets. They appear to be infantry mounted weaponry."

Toshikazu was so shocked that he almost caused an accident as he frantically pulled back on the wheel and roared back into the mic.

"Nationality!?"

"It's registered as an Australian freighter, but based on its shape, it's probably an amphibious vessel for mobile forces."

The registration was falsified.

What the hell were the guys in immigration and the coast guard doing! Suppressing the urge to scream, Toshikazu switched the call.

"......Father? It's Toshikazu. Right now the Yokohama Hillside Harbor is under attack from a camouflaged vessel of unknown nationality. Please request help from national defense. Afterwards, please send Ikazuchimaru and Orochimaru to me ASAP. ......What about Orochimaru? We already decided that it's going to Erika!"

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In order to receive further orders from the unit, Fujibayashi headed for her own car. It wasn't that she didn't want Toshikazu to chase after her, she truly was going to stay here. That was because she was using the transmitter instead of the wheel.

Also, Fujibayashi thought, the one who made that prediction last night was none other than herself, but even she never expected things to turn so grave. Based on her initial estimates, she thought that the spies' confederates would attempt to abduct hostages to rescue their comrades.

Thus, Fujibayashi was quite surprised when she heard the number of men and equipment that Toshikazu shifted at her advice. Now, that move seemed to have paid dividends. Was this brawn over brains? Fujibayashi thought with amazement.

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The hour pointed to 3:37 PM.

Suddenly, explosions and vibrations shook the conference hall.

The audience had no clue what was going on and had no idea what to do.

"Miyuki!"

At this time, Tatsuya called out the name that held the highest priority in his mind.

"Onii-sama!"

Hearing the response from below stage, Tatsuya took two steps — one to leap off the stage, the second to adjust his posture — to reach his sister's side. Although she was in the second row, Miyuki's reaction was equally swift as she reached Tatsuya's side.

"Onii-sama, what is......"

Miyuki asked hesitantly. Though she was slightly bewildered, she was not shocked out of her wits.

"Must be a hand grenade near the front entrance."

On the other hand, Tatsuya didn't show a hint of anxiety or confusion. Tatsuya had already heard this sort of disruption numerous times when training with the Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion. Based on this experience, he didn't even need to access the information dimension to know that the incident occurred near the entrance of the building. While this was no cause for optimism, but now that he had successfully reunited with Miyuki, there was nothing else he needed to worry about.

"Grenades!? Are the upperclassmen alright?"

"The front entrance have security personnel arranged by the Association along with Magicians with combat experience. The average criminal organization stands no chance......"

Despite Tatsuya's answer, he still had a foreboding premonition. Earlier, Fujibayashi had handed him a data card that detailed the possibility that foreign governmental organizations might have a hand in this.

As if to prove his foreboding premonition beyond all doubt, several gunshots were heard.

(Those aren't automatic rifles...... They're high powered rifles used against Magicians!)

The average firearm was rendered impotent against the magic wielded by combat Magicians.

The Juumonji Family's Phalanx was the pinnacle of this and stood as its finest example.

In the latter half of the 21st century, the primary armament for infantry remained firearms, so bullet-resistant magic brought a huge advantage in land warfare.

However, offense and defense always swung back and forth. In order to compensate for powerful defenses, even stronger attacks will be developed. Magic was no exception, as magic was not omnipotent. If the moving object's inertia exceeded the magic's interference strength, then the subsequent magic failure would cause any speed reducing, trajectory altering, or targeting magic to fizzle.

A physical shield that was penetrated would only reduce the blow, but if magic failed to alter the phenomenon then that was the same as having no defenses whatsoever.

The design behind anti-Magician high powered rifles was to introduce high speed rounds with extreme penetration to render defensive magics from Magicians ineffective. However, in order to achieve bullet speeds that would nullify magic from combat Magicians, the technique and development level must surpass typical production caliber by at least 2 or 3 levels.

This is practically beyond even the main armies of smaller countries. Private ownership — without government support — like criminal organizations or terrorists was frankly impossible. Speaking of which, during the assault on Hachiōji Special Detention Center several days ago, Lu Gonghu's comrades were equipped with high powered rifles. For such attacks to strike at such close intervals hinted at a powerful force backing them. Based on this, the enemy was almost guaranteed to be minions from the Great Asian Alliance, or even soldiers from the Alliance itself. Still, what was the reason for their grand assault?

Tatsuya was slightly perplexed. Without knowing his opponent's goals, there was no way to predict the degree of escalation. Generally speaking, he should "prepare for the worst", but currently the worst had no upper limit. Without knowing the "worst case scenario", there was no way to develop proper countermeasures.

Even if setting the average situation as a prerequisite, this main hall wasn't secure either. Normally, he would be leading Miyuki to the resting area to escape danger.

Yet now, there were Erika and Mizuki in the audience stands.

Although he was only responsible for Miyuki's protection, he didn't want to act solely out of duty.

Also, even if he didn't provide protection, the majority of the people possessed the ability to flee on their own, but he couldn't just sit and ignore the people close to him.

Regardless, maybe this was a blessing or a curse, but his headache didn't last very long.

Accompanied by violent footsteps, a squad toting military-grade rifles stormed the crowded stands.

(How useless!)

Though there was a definite possibility, but they still broke through the perimeter too quickly. Amid the screams, Tatsuya mentally clucked his tongue.

While the audience was still stricken with terror, the first ones to decisively leap into action were the students from Third High still on stage.

Apparently, their topic had some sort of anti-personnel use as they operated the CAD on the stage and attempted to use magic against the invaders.

Several gunshots went off.

Faster than Third High's magic could go into effect, several bullets hit the back wall of the stage.

Seeing the power of the bullets, they were definitely holding the high powered rifles that Tatsuya envisioned.

"Be quiet!"

This roar seemed to hint at their source. If they were foreigners, then smuggling themselves into the country must have been a recent incident. They weren't wearing uniforms or combat gear, but there was an odd sense of conformity. There were a variety of colors, but each of them wore high collared shirts and lanky cargo pants of superb make. No matter how you looked at it, these guys were definitely not your run of the mill gangsters.

Modern magic had already achieved speeds that could rival firearms thanks to the advent of the CAD. However, that was only breaking even based on the "Magician's power", so theoretically speaking, they could not attempt any reckless resistance when the enemy had guns ready.

"Put your gear on the floor."

The invaders appeared to be adept at fighting against Magicians.

It was possible they were Magicians themselves.

Only a portion of incredibly powerful Magicians would rely solely on magic in battle. Magicians could also serve as soldiers wielding guns, and in fact the majority of them were.

On the stage, the students from Third High including Kichijouji — Masaki was not there — regretfully placed their CADs on the ground.

Courage and recklessness were two different things. The students from Third High must have been educated on that point.

Tatsuya was slightly moved by their reaction, but unfortunately an incident was heading right his way.

The siblings who were just standing in the path were particularly conspicuous.

"Hey, you two as well."

One of the invaders pointed his gun their way and walked cautiously forward.

The words were undoubtedly aimed at Tatsuya. Strictly speaking, there was no room for misinterpretation.

(So that's it......)

There were a total of six. Three for primary assault and three in support. Tatsuya didn't point his CAD at the invaders who could possibly be terrorists or mobile forces. After all, he couldn't use "Mist Dispersal" in front of so many people, but the situation might not allow him otherwise.

(Need to try and use other magic to cover this.)

Just as Tatsuya ruminated on this with a blank expression on his face, the invader repeated his angry howl.

"Faster!"

The angry howl was more frantic, but Tatsuya didn't move a whisker. The sort of thinking that abandoned all resistance to preserve personal safety didn't jibe with his education and training.

Tatsuya wordlessly watched the approaching man.

No, his gaze would be more appropriately described as "observed".

There was no trace of fear or unease in his eyes.

He was only observing the man's entire body, the weapon in his hand, and the flashing muzzle.

Probably growing more and more anxious by the cold eyes watching him or subconsciously feeling the tendrils of a nameless dread, the man approaching Tatsuya increased the pressure on the trigger finger.

"Hey, wait!"

He likely failed to discern his comrade's voice.

A volley of gunfire sounded amid the cries.

The bullets filled with discernible killing intent were fired from within 3 meters, causing people to envision an unavoidable tragedy, which only deepened the shock people felt.

A right hand held something before his chest.

That was the sole change in Tatsuya's posture.

Not a single drop of blood flowed down his body.

The bullets that were fired left no traces on the walls, ceiling, or roof.

Spasms broke out over the man's face, as he fired a second, third time.

Each time, Tatsuya's right hand flashed towards another position.

The hand motion was so fast that no bystander could see what he was doing.

By the time anyone could react, they could only see the change in the hand's position as it remained holding something.

"He...... couldn't be catching the bullets, could he?"

Someone woodenly murmured.

"How, is he doing this......?"

Another nameless individual replied blankly.

"Monster!"

The man threw aside his gun because he was stricken by panic.

Setting aside using magic to block bullets, seeing the outrageous sight of someone catching the bullets would naturally create the misconception that guns had lost their use.

However, his fighting spirit was not broken as he pulled out a combat blade and swung it towards Tatsuya. Plainly, the man was a highly trained soldier.

But, the next act shocked everyone even further.

Tatsuya didn't look like he had any time to avoid the incoming attack, so he opened his hand to form a karate chop and slashed towards the man's wrist that was holding the blade.

Tatsuya's karate chop sheared through the man's wrist with no resistance whatsoever.

"Ah!"

A scream started to issue from the man's mouth — but that was all he could manage

Before the sound could fully turn into a scream, Tatsuya's left fist impacted the man's chest.

The blood spewing from the shredded right wrist stained Tatsuya's clothes.

That was all the resistance (?) the man could muster.

Without sparing a glance at the fallen man, Tatsuya leaped backwards and returned to Miyuki's side to protect her.

This unexpected, even unimaginable turnout caused the audience and the invaders to freeze in their tracks.

Not only was all physical activity suspended, even their minds ground to a halt.

Except for one person.

"Onii-sama, I need to clean up the blood stains, please wait a second."

Miyuki's soft words traveled to every corner of the previously silent conference hall.

Her voice did not waver in the slightest.

As if saying that she would "dust off the lint", there was no trace of unease or incompatibility.

That voice also served as a signal for the halted time to move forward.

"On them!"

Security personnel from both sides of the stage unleashed their magic. Although the invaders sought evasive action, under the well-trained magic attacks from the students selected for the Nine Schools Competition, they were taken out without exception.

Miyuki activated her magic and cleansed the blood stains on Tatsuya's hand and clothes. (Accurately speaking, the moisture was evaporated from the clothes and skin before dispelling the solids.)

Although this was a matter of life and death, Tatsuya never batted an eyelid.

No, "not batting an eyelid" would be incorrect. While it was true that there was no trace of wavering or excitement on his face, he did furrow his brows when he looked at the man collapsed in the pool of his own blood.

Seeing that minute change in expression, Miyuki immediately activated another magic.

The eviscerated right hand and wrist were frozen and the blood pool on the ground dehydrated to a dark red dust.

Tatsuya turned around to find Miyuki smiling gently at him.

Subconsciously, Tatsuya could only smile at his hyper competent little sister.

Seeing her brother smile, Miyuki's eyes glazed over for some reason (from Tatsuya's perspective).

However, this wasn't the time to contemplate something like that as Tatsuya walked towards the entrance.

Immediately, Miyuki was right on his heels.

The siblings completely ignored the man with the severed wrist as they stepped over him.

At this time,

"Tatsuya-kun!" "Tatsuya!"

At the same time, voices from a young lady and man called out.

Normally, the two of them would frown at being so uniform, but this was not the time and place.

Following Erika and Leo, Mikihiko, Mizuki, Honoka, and Shizuku surrounded Tatsuya and Miyuki.

"What's with the hand! Are you hurt!?"

Despite Erika and Leo arriving first, Honoka's frantic question didn't lose out to them in the slightest.

Seeing the earlier hand motion, Honoka consciously realized that there was some theatrics involved, but she wasn't clear on what exactly occurred.

In reality, he didn't catch the bullets themselves, but used "Decomposition" on the physical body of the bullet and the trajectory and thus nullified the shots. Towards his friends who naturally knew nothing about this, Tatsuya said "It's nothing" and raised his right hand to form a fist a few times to show them.

Seeing this, Honoka and Mizuki finally relaxed, but Mikihiko and Shizuku were watching Tatsuya with eyes that clearly said "How did you do that".

Still, Tatsuya did not answer these unvoiced questions (not that he could answer these questions even if asked). He only answered Erika's question.

"Now we're committed...... What's the next move?"

Why does she seem so upbeat about this, the retort was on his lips before he swallowed it since this would waste precious time.

"Regardless of whether we choose to flee or counterattack, the first priority is to take out the enemy at the front entrance."

After he said this, Tatsuya paused for a moment.

"Wait a second, why did you stop?"

He originally wanted to say "So you do appear to be very happy" to Erika, who stood there with eyes sparkling, but after further consideration, he slowly shook his head.

"Splitting up is somewhat better than reacting all the time and taking hits."

"Somewhat" was his only concession towards passive agreement.

Thus, when he realized that not only Erika and Honoka, but even Mizuki and Shizuku lightened up at this, Tatsuya couldn't help but think "Give me a break......"

That being said, this was a state of emergency, so there was no time to lose.

Tatsuya quickly led them towards the entrance.

"Wait a minute...... Just wait a minute, Shiba Tatsuya!"

However, they were unable to depart during the chaos because a voice frantically called them to a stop.

"What is it, Kichijouji Shinkurou?"

Tatsuya ruthlessly asked back.

Yet, Kichijouji was not cowed by Tatsuya's displeasure, or maybe because he didn't have time to be afraid, so Kichijouji continued questioning Tatsuya.

"Was that 'Molecular Divider'!?"

Kichijouji's question caused everyone around them to start chattering to one another.

"Molecular Divider Magic was a secret technique developed by the previous USNA Combat Magicians Commander, Major William Sirius. Unlike magic that weakens the molecular bonds, Molecular Divider Magic is one of the USNA's most classified military secrets!"

It was unknown whether this was a knowledge error, but Kichijouji's interpretation was completely off the mark, but that suited Tatsuya just fine.

"Why are you able to use that! How could you possibly know!?"

"Is this the time and place to discuss something like that?"

At the barrage of questions, Tatsuya intentionally used a tone that seemed to frantically try to maintain the facade — to Kichijouji, this sounded like "there's no need to hide this any longer" — and curtailed the conversation.

Of course, the truth was otherwise. The magic Tatsuya used was not the USNA military's secret magic "Molecular Divider", nor was he using martial arts to allow his bare hands to shear through human flesh. Just as he decomposed the bullets, he used his right hand as the origin and activated Decomposition Magic at point blank range.

However, he was still under orders to maintain confidentiality. Also, this wasn't the time and place to explain.

"Saegusa-senpai, Nakajou-senpai, please evacuate from the area as soon as possible. Although their final goal remains unknown, their primary objective must be to kill or kidnap students with advanced magic skills."

After leaving this warning for Mayumi, who just appeared from the wings of the stage to see what happened, and Azusa, who sat in the last row as one of the judges, Tatsuya departed from the scene.

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Just as Tatsuya and company vanished through the doorway, an incredibly violent explosion shook the conference hall.

Chaotic screaming and the furious din combined to shatter everyone's nerves.

Currently, the chaos had not spread to where Azusa stood in the foremost row of the judges' seats.

Not yet.

However, at the current progression, this panic would undoubtedly lead to a stampede with lots of injuries. At this time, Azusa had no idea what to do or how to do anything and could only stand there frozen.

"A-chan, A-chan...... Student Council President Nakajou!"

Someone on stage reprimanded Azusa.

Hurriedly clambering to her feet, Azusa raised her head to the stage.

Standing on one side of the stage, Mayumi took several steps forward, caught Azusa's eyes, and spoke to her.

"At this rate, this will descend into a panic with lots of people getting hurt. So please use your power to settle everyone down."

"Eh!?"

Mayumi's words caused Azusa's eyes to widen.

This was not because she didn't comprehend her meaning.

"But, that......"

Azusa's magic could interfere with the mentality of others and clamp down on panic, making it particularly effective in these situations. However, mental interference magic was a highly restricted branch of magic and was not something adolescents could wield with impunity.

"Isn't your strength reserved for precisely these sorts of situations? Not my power or Mari or Suzune's power, Azusa, right now we need your power."

At this moment, Mayumi wasn't messing around with her words. She said Suzune, not "Rin-chan", and Azusa, not "A-chan".

Normally, decorum demanded that she refer to them as "Ichihara" and "Nakajou", but she could count on the fingers of one hand the number of times Mayumi called her by name. Based on this point alone, Azusa could tell that Mayumi was deathly serious and was earnestly requesting her to use mental interference magic "Azusa Yumi".

"Don't worry about it, I'll take responsibility. The Saegusa name isn't just for show."

Mayumi adorably winked in order to ease Azusa's mind. Calling on the "Saegusa" name was to hold off those in power who could just stand and fret at this chaos.

She could understand that much. That sentence was no lie.

She didn't want to put all the burden onto Mayumi, but this wasn't the time to say that.

Azusa vigorously nodded and turned out, directing her gaze to the squabbling audience.

She extended her hand to the necklace around her neck and pulled out a small pendant from her collar that could have been hidden in an elementary school student's hand. Azusa unclasped the pendant and held it in her left hand.

She took a deep breath and flooded the pendant with psions.

This pendant was the core component of a CAD that was designed to support exactly one type of magic. Only one Activation Sequence was recorded within and, since only one function was necessary, all other components needed for switching Activation Sequences like buttons or monitors were excluded to form a miniature magic staff.

A magic wand forged for one person and equipped with one magic spell.

Azusa activated emotional interference magic "Azusa Yumi". —A clear note that could be heard from front to back spread across the conference hall.

This was a hallucinatory sound.

It was not air, but a subconscious sound of the tides.

It was not the oscillation of psions, but waves of pushions.

Everyone thirsted for the clear reverberation the same way a traveler stranded in a murky, foul swamp felt the first drop of rain and raised their head to wait for the next one. Their entire consciousness was concentrated here.

Before the first echo could disappear into the aether, everyone was subconsciously looking forward to the next note.

People desperately wished for the next sound.

At some point, cognitive processing stopped and listening was all that remained.

This lasted for a mere 3 seconds.

This paltry amount of time was all that was needed for people to switch from a state of panic to a trance.

"I am Saegusa Mayumi, former Student Council President of First High."

The suspended consciousness of the audience was drawn by Mayumi's voice that was amplified by the speakers.

"Right now, we are under attack."

The voice that captured everyone's attention dropped another sentence that sent everyone's expression from blankness to a state of shock.

"An unidentified vessel moored in the harbor is launching rocket attacks. In support of this, mobile forces concealed in the city have also launched their assault."

These were truly astounding words.

For Azusa, if Mayumi hadn't been the one saying this, she would definitely have been skeptical.

But, just as Mayumi herself had said, "the Saegusa name isn't just for show".

If it was her, then she would definitely get wind of the news and based on her standing, she couldn't be sprouting lies. No matter how ludicrous her words were, they must be the truth.

"Earlier, the malefactors we captured should be the invader's comrades. Based on the earlier sounds of explosions, the target is likely the Magicians and magic technology in this building."

Mayumi paused briefly when she reached this point and swept her gaze over the crowd.

Everyone was waiting on her words with bated breath.

"As everyone knows, this conference hall has an underground tunnel which serves as an evacuation route to an emergency shelter."

No one shifted his or her gaze from Mayumi.

"The emergency shelter has the capacity to hold us all."

They hung on to every one of her words.

"However, the underground shelter can only protect against natural disasters and air strikes."

Not just the students, even the adults were completely focused on her.

"It cannot stand against land based military forces."

Even the "powers that be", so used to ordering people around, were listening in.

"We suspect that the enemy has invested Magicians in the units. Unfortunately, the outlook for a shelter to last against magical attacks is not positive."

Now, everyone present knew of Mayumi. Regardless of whether it was her appearance, her competition performance, or the meaning behind her name.

That was why not a single person derided her depressing outlook as "child's play". Taking in account the might of the "Saegusa" name, even the educators gave Mayumi free rein here.

"That being said, fleeing into the crossfire on the streets would be even more dangerous. However, right now the most dangerous option is to remain here."

Immediately, the conference hall quieted.

Mayumi was not foolish enough to waste this opportunity.

"Representatives from each school please begin gathering students from your school. Whether we are going to flee to the shelter or flee the conference hall, there is no time to waste."

A wholly different ruckus spread across the hall. The voices calling out to one another were different in that there was an orderly sequence to them.

"My apologies to the individuals unaffiliated with the nine schools, but please make your own way to safety. I regret to say that we do not possess the power to guarantee everyone's safety."

This may seem like a ruthless statement, but there were no objections or catcalls. Everyone present was related to magic on some level, so when compared to normal plebeians, they generally approached the "abnormal" crowd.

"If you're heading for the shelter, please take the underground passage immediately. If you wish to flee, there are reports that the coast guard is sending ships to the Mizuho Docks."

Mayumi bowed and cut the mic before turning to Azusa.

"A-chan, I'll leave everyone to you. Teachers, please assist Nakajou."

The teachers with Tsudzura at their head nodded. On the other side, Azusa's eyes widened.

"Eh? President, no, Mayumi?"

Seeing Azusa bubbling with questions with widened eyes, Mayumi smiled and nodded.

"It's perfectly clear. A-chan, you're the current Student Council President for First High. Don't worry, I know you can do it. After all, you were the one I personally trained."

Mayumi winked before turning away and hurrying to the resting area with Suzune and company.

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Directly ahead of the front entrance, assault rifles and magic were exchanging fire.

The attacking mobile forces all had East Asian faces. They wore high collared tunics and lanky cargo pants of varying colors, much like the terrorists who invaded the conference hall. They were equipped with normal assault rifles and high powered rifles to handle Magicians.

The ones who engaged the mobile forces were professional Magicians employed by the Magic Association.

However, given the fact that the front entrance was breached, the situation was not in their favor.

The mobile forces originally had the numerical advantage and now had anti-Magician armament, which was why several combat Magicians, who were typically a target that infantry with normal load outs could not approach, were lying wounded on the ground.

Advancing forward, Tatsuya stopped in the shaded areas near the main entrance. Behind him, Miyuki also came to a halt. Yet behind them, the next two people following them were full of vigor and about to charge forward.

"Halt! Those are high powered bullets used against Magicians!"

He shouted at Erika as she was about to pass by him,

"Oof!"

And forcibly dragged Leo back by the collar.

"......How merciless, Tatsuya."

"But thanks to you, I'm still breathing."

A beat later, the other four people arrived. Mikihiko seemed appreciative of Tatsuya's violent gesture and even a little envious while Shizuku replied in her usual bland tone. Tatsuya was quite thankful for his friends that remained calm even under these conditions, but before a wry smile made its way across his face, he turned his eyes towards his sister.

"Miyuki, silence the guns."

Hearing Tatsuya's words, all of his friends revealed a "Hm?" expression of shock.

"As you command. But Onii-sama, in order to handle so many people......"

For some reason, Miyuki's reply contained a degree of embarrassment that was utterly alien to this situation.

Exactly what was the cause of her embarrassment, this new enigma caused everyone to tilt their heads.

"I understand."

Tatsuya's next gesture immediately solved this riddle.

Miyuki gently wrapped her right-hand fingers around Tatsuya's outstretched left hand.

No matter what angle one looked it, that embarrassed expression should not be something a sister wore when facing her brother.

But before anyone could raise the question, Miyuki's expression turned solemn, an expression befitting a Magician.

Her left hand moved in a natural manner difficult to detect and gripped the CAD.

Tatsuya slowly raised his right hand parallel to the ground and pointed to the mobile forces from his hiding spot.

The next instant, Miyuki's magic activated.

It was a magic that could freeze fire.

Oscillation Speed-Type Wide Area Magic "Freeze Flame".

"Freeze Flame" was a wide area conceptual magic that prevented anything from burning.

This magic could suppress the temperature of targets within a certain threshold.

At the end of the day, firearms rely on gunpowder — in other words, burning gunpowder to create the force necessary to propel the bullet. The detonation that ignited the gunpowder was also a type of burning. Generally, the concept was that burning a target would raise the temperature, but if the flammable object could be prevented from heating up, then ignition would become impossible. Thus, firearms that have been subjected to "Freeze Flame", regardless of whether they were guns or cannons would be silenced so long as they relied on gunpowder or explosives.

There were roughly 30 men left in the guerrilla unit.

Miyuki's upper limit for mass targeting was approximately 16.

She set 30 odd assault rifles as the target for two volleys of "Freeze Flame".

Before ascertaining the result, Tatsuya had already charged from where he hid behind the doorway.

In a flash, he was already in the mobile forces' formation and waving both hands with a magic edge.

The terrifying image of someone chopping through human flesh with their bare hands was all the more shocking because the magic being used remained a mystery. Thus, in comparison to their allies being shot, this scene terrorized the enemy even more.

Despite their difficult situation owing to the inoperable rifles, the mobile forces initially still acted decisively and drew blades to engage, but their morale was completely crushed by the time the fifth person had been cut down.

They watched Tatsuya with the same eyes they would use on a monster.

He rejected long range magic attacks and intentionally opted for close quarters combat magic with its degree of risk not only to avoid letting his friends discover the truth behind his magic, but also to sow panic among his enemies.

Being seen as the devil incarnate was precisely what Tatsuya wanted.

On the flank of the irregular force whose morale was in tatters, a silver wind flew across with a speed that the eye could barely follow.

Everywhere the wind passed over, blood and flesh flew as an enemy trooper died on the spot.

The kodachi, nay, based on its length the weapon should be a wakizashi.

The true image of the chilling silver wind was this short sword.

Swapping her usual Weaponized Integrated CAD in the shape of a police baton for a wakizashi without the guard, Erika activated personal Speed-Type Magic and took aim at the mobile force's jugular.

She, like Tatsuya, was not someone who hesitated when taking the life of an enemy. For her, this wasn't the first time. And besides that, someone like her who wielded a weapon designed to take life and trained in techniques to do so, she knew the dangers brought on by hesitation. Under the condition that the enemy seeks your life, any hesitation towards returning the favor in kind would be arrogant and foolish in the extreme. Erika was an ardent believer in this.

Mikihiko also shared similar sentiments. Nurtured in a family whose values system over the generations considered magic to be a weapon, he had no delusions about the original purpose and usage of magic.

"Tatsuya, Erika!"

Hearing Mikihiko's voice from behind, both of them quickly sprang aside.

What came from behind was the true wind.

Sharp razor winds mercilessly tore through and eviscerated the soldiers' skin.

After leaving the remnants of the enemy for the Magicians on duty to handle, Tatsuya and Erika returned to their companions for now.

"There was no opportunity to do anything......"

Tatsuya patted the gloomy Leo on the back in encouragement (to which Leo sullenly crouched), raised a thumbs up at Mikihiko before smiling slightly towards Honoka and Mizuki, who were plainly trying to resist their urge to retch and whose eyes bore traces of fear.

"My apologies. This may be a little too extreme for you guys, Honoka."

"—No, it's OK."

Honoka firmly nodded her head, which was probably her affection at work.

Regardless of the reason, keeping her composure deserved top marks.

Fear or avoidance could wait until they have extricated themselves from this situation, those were Tatsuya's true feelings.

"Mizuki?"

"Ah...... I'm fine as well."

Miyuki's soft question caused Mizuki's originally stiff expression to break into a smile. She was a smart girl. She fully understood that this wasn't a normal situation.

"Speaking of which, Erika, how did you bring that kind of weapon here? I don't think that length can fit in a bag, can it?"

Nonetheless, scenes of death were not something that a person could immediately adjust to and the subsequent shock would not fade immediately.

He intentionally changed the topic to an unimportant one to give the two of them time to settle down.

"Hm, I don't think that's enough?"

Afterwards, using a more amicable tone than usual to reply, Erika also seemed to have caught on to Tatsuya's intentions.

"And how about this......?"

"Ho, seriously......."

The expressive sigh that sprouted from Tatsuya's lips was no act.

Somewhere along the way, Honoka and Mizuki had their eyes drawn there, and even Miyuki, Shizuku, and Mikihiko widened their eyes.

Still, there was a little mechanism worthy of such astonishment.

Erika pressed the power button on the hilt and the thin, razor sharp blade shrank into a round baton.

"Cool, eh? This is the memory blade that the police plan to put into the field starting next year."

"Now that you mention it, the Chiba Family also makes close combat weapons......"

"Strictly speaking, that's the chief source of income."

Although this wasn't a hilarious exchange, their light and swift interchange was sufficient to allow Mizuki and the others to recover themselves.

"......So, what's the next step?"

Leo had also learned to read the mood.

They weren't going to make it, he hinted with his words as he asked Tatsuya for further instructions.

"We require additional information. Erika said there appears to be a major incident in process that far surpasses our expectations. Aimless action may be like sinking into the quagmire."

—They needed to obtain necessary intel from the Magic Association.

The main and side branches for the Magic Association had secret lines reserved for the Ten Master Clans and Tatsuya held the authority to directly access the Yotsuba Family line. Once linked to that line, even top secret information from Joint Chiefs was at his disposal.

If Tatsuya was alone, he would be able to reach the Kantou branch of the Magic Association in the Bay Hills Tower in approximately ten minutes despite the fighting in the streets. He wasn't engaged in high speed running exercises every morning for nothing.

However, Miyuki would be unable to keep up with Tatsuya's pace without roller skates or Flying-Type Magic. Leo, Erika, and Mikihiko might be capable, but one look at Honoka, Shizuku, and Mizuki told him that this was beyond them.

"How about the VIP conference room?"

As Tatsuya subconsciously creased his eyebrows, Shizuku made this proposal as she pointed at the building they just exited.

"The VIP conference room?"

Tatsuya didn't know of such a facility. He knew of the VIP waiting room, but this shouldn't be a slip of words. Also, the room Tatsuya had in mind was a mere waiting room and only possessed a standard phone line.

"Yeah. That's the room reserved for cabinet members and financial group leaders, so a lot of information can be accessed there."

"There's actually such a room?"

"That's because this conference room isn't open to the public."

"......It's amazing that you would know about it."

Erika's comment was wholly admiration, to which Shizuku bashfully replied with a hint of delight.

"I know the ID key and access codes as well."

"Incredible......"

"Uncle really spoils Shizuku."

Honoka's interjection caused Tatsuya to nod his head as if to say "that makes sense". That particular father would definitely do that.

Given that this is a room for "Kitayama Ushio", they would definitely be able to tap into the police and coast guard's communications.

"Shizuku, please lead the way."

Hearing Tatsuya's words, Shizuku nodded vigorously, which for her was a rarely seen overreaction.

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After using Shizuku's access code to enter the VIP conference room and examining the police map data on the monitors, they found that the entire shore was flagged as red and dangerous. In addition, the red danger zones were rapidly expanding in land.

The enemy's numbers remained unknown. Still, based on their invading pace, they had undoubtedly invested a significant amount of troops. There were several hundred at the bare minimum, Tatsuya estimated, probably company strength around 600 to 800 men. The situation was deteriorating far beyond initial estimations, causing Tatsuya to crease his brows again.

"What the heck is this!"

"That's going too far."

"So many people...... How did this happen?"

Owing to his friends' exaggerated reactions, his dark visage did not attract any attention.

"Onii-sama....."

Although he wasn't conspicuous, there was no way Miyuki would remain oblivious. His mental waves would directly cause his sister to waver because their hearts were connected as one.

Repeatedly caressing his sister's head as her eyes shimmered with unease, Tatsuya turned to his friends.

"I think everyone understands the situation without going into the details and the situation is dire. If we waste too much time here, we will be captured before the JSDF arrives. That being said, escape will not be an easy prospect. At least going by land won't be with all traffic systems offline."

"In other words, we go by sea?"

Tatsuya shook his head at Leo's question.

"That would be a slim hope. The mobilized ships are likely unable to accommodate all the evacuees."

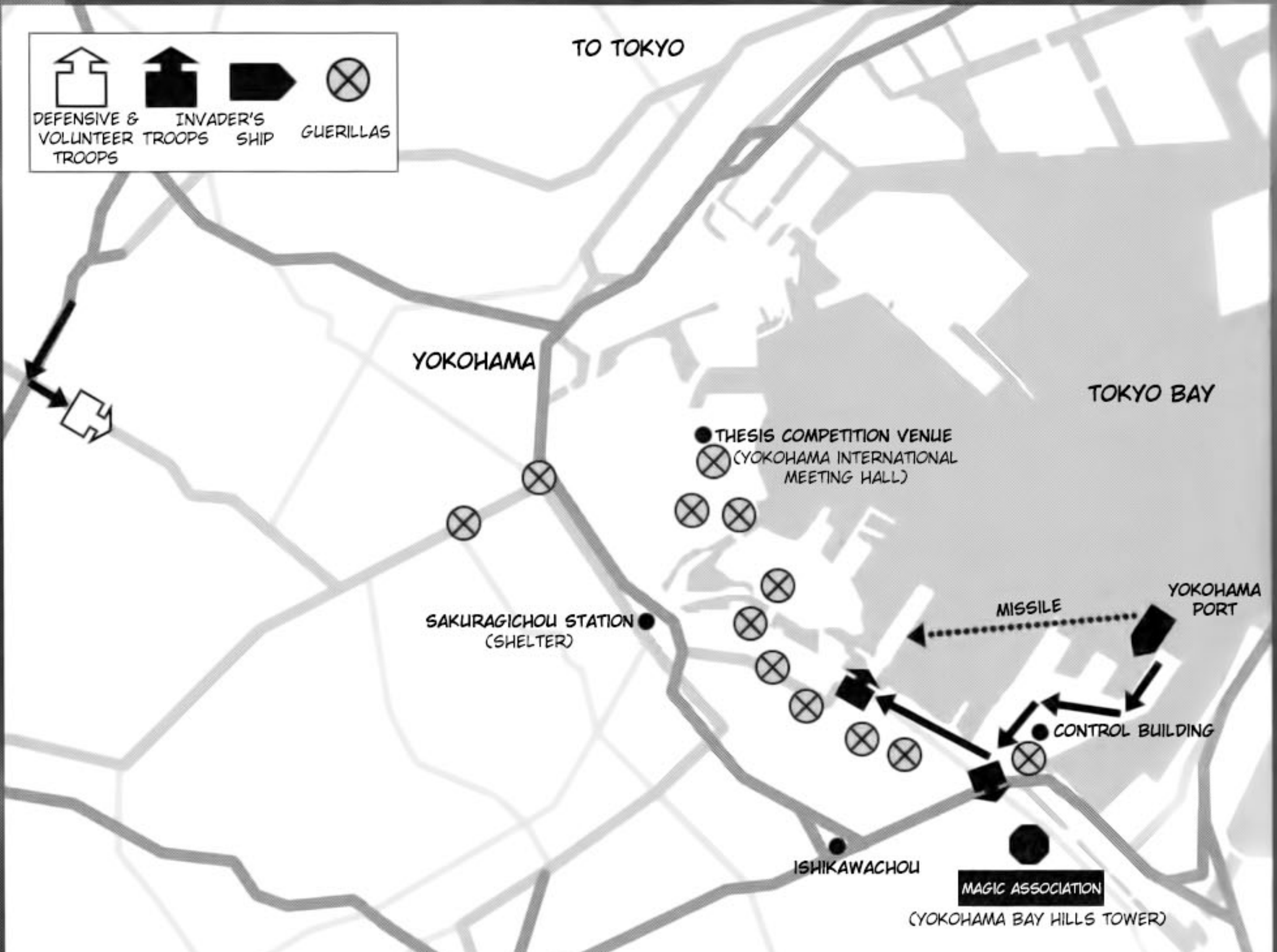
"So we head to the shelter?"

Tatsuya nodded at Mikihiko's proposal, but he didn't appear to be very confident.

"That's probably more practical...... The infrastructure is fairly sturdy, but that won't help if the building itself is destroyed."

YOKOHAMA INCIDENT OUTLINE

1


DEFENSIVE & VOLUNTEER TROOPS
INVADER'S TROOPS
SHIP
GUERILLAS
TO TOKYO
YOKOHAMA
TOKYO BAY
THESIS COMPETITION VENUE (YOKOHAMA INTERNATIONAL MEETING HALL)
SAKURAGICHOU STATION (SHELTER)
MISSILE
YOKOHAMA PORT
CONTROL BUILDING
ISHIKAWACHOU
MAGIC ASSOCIATION (YOKOHAMA BAY HILLS TOWER)
TO YOKOSUKA

AD 2095 OCTOBER 30th

3:30 PM BATTLE COMMENCEMENT

"So, let's take the underground tunnel."

Although Erika urged him onward as if she wanted to rush out the door, Tatsuya replied back with "please wait".

"No, don't go underground. Go above."

"Eh, why? ......Ah, that's why."

Seeing Erika comprehend the reason why before any explanation was necessary, Tatsuya couldn't help but think "As expected of a famous family skilled in combat magic".

Still, his "please wait" referred to more than that.

"Also, can you give me a little time?"

"That's not a problem...... But what for?"

Seeing Tatsuya ask for further delay despite knowing better than anyone that every second was precious, Honoka tilted her head and asked for the reason. While this question was built on the prerequisite that "Yes" was the answer, this was her way of expressing her emotions to Tatsuya.

"I want to delete the data on the demonstration devices."

"Ah, yes. That might also be one of the enemy's goals."

Everyone nodded at Mikihiko's added note.

"Shiba, Yoshida."

Tatsuya and Mikihiko led the group along the way from the elevator to the back stage and were called to a stop by a heavy voice that came from the abdomen.

Tatsuya and Mikihiko only knew one person who could speak with such a vigorous voice.

"Juumonji-senpai."

Turning their heads, they found Juumonji Katsuto advancing with Hattori and Sawaki following him. All three wore Kevlar with light bulletproof plates. The fact that Katsuto, with his powerful magic barrier ability, was wearing personal body armor was sufficient to drive home how dire the situation was.

"Everyone else is together. Did you guys not evacuate in time?"

In other words, they should "quickly evacuate".

"Just in case, we are going to delete the data on the demonstration devices to prevent theft. In regards to everyone else, I think moving as one group is preferable to splitting up."

In order to hide the fact that they literally hacked into a secret conference room, Tatsuya hesitated briefly over how to explain his companions before going with that white lie. (The first half was true.)

"But the other students have already gone into the underground tunnel."

That was Hattori's comment.

"What's wrong with the underground tunnel?"

Deftly noting the subtle change when Tatsuya creased his eyebrows, Sawaki immediately asked.

"I can't say that it's wrong...... But the underground tunnel doesn't lead directly to the shelter so there is a possibility they will run into other organizations. Possibly."

"You mean there's a chance they will walk into a fight!?"

Before Tatsuya could finish, Hattori immediately exploded with a question. No, although phrased as a question, in reality he already reached an answer.

"Freedom of movement will be restricted in the underground tunnel. Unable to hide or flee, the chance of being forced into a head-on confrontation definitely exists. Thus I opted to advance above ground."

Katsuto's decision was swift.

"Hattori, Sawaki, go after Nakajou now."

"Yes."

"Got it."

Seeing the two of them sprint off, Katsuto glanced at Tatsuya. There was a hint of a reprimand in that look.

"Shiba, when compared to your cunning, it appears that your actions are a little too cautious."

Of course, Tatsuya got the drift of what Katsuto was driving at. Still, he didn't just frankly accept it either. At any rate, he made no rebuttal.

"No need to say anything else. Let's move."

"Understood."

This time, Katsuto was following Tatsuya.

Acknowledging the need in Tatsuya's aim, Katsuto chose to assist in this endeavour. This was something Tatsuya comprehended without a word being spoken.

"What are you people doing!?"

Returning to the backstage with the demonstration devices, Tatsuya's opening comment completely set himself aside. Here, not only Suzune and Isori failed to evacuate and were crowded around the device, but there was also Mayumi, Mari, Kanon, Kirihara, and Sayaka nearby standing on guard.

"Data deletion."

What they were doing was plainly obvious. The real question Tatsuya wanted to ask was "why are you still here". Tatsuya had no response for Suzune's literal answer.

"Saegusa, you guys didn't evacuate?"

"Rin-chan and Isori-kun are both doing their best, how can we just leave them and flee first?"

Katsuto verbalized Tatsuya's thoughts but was also rendered speechless by that perfectly natural response.

"We'll handle this one. We'll leave the one in the resting area to you, Shiba-kun."

"If you can, please destroy the models left behind by the other schools as well."

"After finishing here we'll also head for the resting area. We'll decide our next step there."

After receiving Isori, Kanon, and Mari's request (order?), Tatsuya and Katsuto turned around.

By the time Tatsuya finished combing the resting areas of the other schools with Miyuki accompanying him and returned (he didn't bring anyone else because he didn't want other people to see him decompose the data specifics, leaving behind an empty storage device), Suzune and the others had finished their work in the backstage and have already returned to the resting area.

"Welcome back. That was fast."

"And the result?"

"All data on the remaining devices has been destroyed."

In regards to the question from the engaged couple, Isori and Kanon, Tatsuya replied in this manner.

"Eh...... How did you do that?"

Though this was the expected result, astonishment was unavoidable. Seeing Kanon wear this expression as she pressed her next question, Tatsuya replied simply.

"That's a secret."

"Kanon, you cannot inquire about other Magicians' spell work. That is against the rules, remember?"

The one who spoke up was none other than Isori.

Kanon was plainly unwilling to drop the issue, but still obediently backed down.

"So, now we have to decide what to do next."

After saying this, Mari looked towards Mayumi.

"There is only one hostile vessel invading the harbor. Currently, no other enemy vessels have been discovered in Tokyo Bay. Although the enemy numbers on land have yet to be identified, the enemy has a stranglehold on the entire shoreline. Land-based communications are practically completely disabled, another thing we have to thank the mobile forces for."

"What is their goal?"

Mayumi and Mari exchanged a glance at Isori's question.

"Right now, we can only guess......"

Mayumi was the one who answered.

"By targeting Yokohama for their attack, they must be aiming for the sole possible target in Yokohama. Strictly speaking, Kyoto is the same."

"The side branch of the Magic Association."

Kanon interjected before she could finish.

"To be precise, the target is the main Magic Association database. Since all major data is compiled in Kyoto and Yokohama, we also have to take into consideration that many specialists and scholars are gathered here for the Thesis Competition."

Mayumi chuckled wryly at Kanon's anxious attitude and added a few pointers of her own.

"When does the rescue ship arrive?"

In response to Mari's question or more like what she wanted to verify, Mayumi's answer was not very positive.

"The coast guard's cargo ship needs another ten minutes to arrive. However, based on the number of people that gathered and need to be evacuated, the ship will not have sufficient capacity to carry them all."

Mayumi's information was on par with the details that Tatsuya and company received upstairs. In other words, there would definitely be people unable to evacuate.

"Nakajou-san and the others who headed for the shelter unfortunately made Shiba-kun's fears a reality. They ran into mobile forces en route and have been bogged down. However, since the enemy numbers are quite few, they should be able to run them off after not too long according to Nakajou-san's last transmission."

After Mayumi, Suzune continued to speak.

"The situation is as everyone heard. While we don't know how much room is left at the shelter, we're going to be too late for the boat. In that case, I believe we can only head for the shelter. What does everyone else think?"

Mayumi, Mari, Suzune.

Isori, Kanon, Sayaka.

Tatsuya, Miyuki, Erika, Leo, Mikihiko, Mizuki, Honoka, Shizuku.

There were the above 14 people here.

Katsuto had taken Kirihara, who originally stayed to protect Suzune, and went to verify if anyone else hadn't escaped in time.

The three Year 3 students kept their mouths shut.

Probably because they wanted to hear their underclassmen's thoughts.

That being said, their thoughts were all in accord with Mari.

"......I also agree with Mari-nee's opinion."

The Year 2 students like Kanon probably thought they didn't have any other choice.

All the Year 1 students turned their eyes towards Tatsuya.

With Mari's interrogative eyes on him, his eyes...... were watching an entirely different direction.

Faster than the eye could follow, he raised a silver CAD.

"Onii-sama!?" "Tatsuya-kun!?"

As if in response to Miyuki and Mayumi's questions, Tatsuya aimed at the wall and pulled the trigger.

Tatsuya never forgot for a single moment that there were many witnesses present.

However, there was no time to ensure secrecy at this point.

It was pure coincidence that he was able to notice this.

Maybe this was the instincts that Yakumo honed in him talking. Yakumo repeatedly taught Tatsuya not to overly rely on "Elemental Sight" and that looked to pay dividends now.

Engulfed in a powerful sense of danger, Tatsuya extended his "sight" beyond the wall to read the signal that a large physical object was barreling down on them.

If Katsuto was present, the outcome might be different.

If enemy soldiers rushed in, he could leave it to Mayumi or Mari.

Time permitting, he could also let Miyuki handle it.

Yet, in this instant, only Tatsuya's magic was able to handle the incoming large armored truck.

Height 4 meters, width 3 meters, total weight 30 tons.

Enlarging the scope another level to accommodate the uniform rise of the street and placing the entire large truck with armor plating in his targeting hairs, Tatsuya activated Decomposition Magic "Mist Dispersal".

In a flash, the large truck faded into dust.

The driver was ejected from the suddenly vanishing driver's seat and rolled straight forward to collide into the wall.

Thanks to inertia, the remnants of metallic and resin dust hitting the wall of the conference center were all that remained of that large truck's passage.

A few minor lacerations were found on the outside of the wall, but internally, no damage was incurred.

Yet, the world was not so convenient that no one detected what just happened.

"......Just now, what......?"

Mayumi's terrified question caused Tatsuya to want to cluck his tongue. Mayumi seemed to have noticed what just happened exactly like he worried she would.

Along his line of sight, she must have used Sensory-Type Magic "Multi Scope" to look beyond the wall. However, fortunately — this was only deferring the question — there was no need to answer that question.

Mayumi's expanding vision caused her face to turn pale for another reason.

Also expanding his sight, Tatsuya grasped the reason why.

Looks like the people remaining in the conference hall have been identified by the enemy as dangerous personnel, Tatsuya thought.

Since the soldiers invading the conference hall had been captured and the battle at the entrance turned into a rout, the objective shifted from capture to eradication.

Part of his consciousness was coldly analyzing the situation as if he had no part in it while the remaining energy was channeled towards magic that could meet a rain of guided missiles.

Nevertheless, this time there was no need for Tatsuya to do anything.

The wall of the room they were standing in was covered by multiple layers of magic barriers.

Before the missiles could hit the wall, sonic waves fired from the flank detonated all the missiles en route.

"Sorry for the wait."

Hearing a sudden voice from the outside, both Tatsuya and Mayumi reined in their sight to the range of the naked eye.

As if waiting for this cue — although he really wanted to believe she had better character than that — a woman entered the waiting room.

"Eh? Eh? This can't be. Kyouko-nee?"

"Long time no see, Mayumi."

Suddenly appearing, Fujibayashi smiled and greeted Mayumi like an old friend.

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Katsuto ran into a rain of missiles because he detected the presence of powerful magic at the place.

Magicians could detect the usage of magic based on reactions to changes in phenomena.

Yet, this magic almost engendered no reaction whatsoever.

Despite this, Katsuto clearly understood that the "world" underwent massive change.

Not using the five senses to read the "meaning" was not a skill unique to Tatsuya.

Katsuto used magic to manipulate space, so he was exceptionally sensitive to changes in spatial distribution.

Distribution of matter was one of the core elements to basic spatial manipulation.

Katsuto was able to use his senses and the changes in spatial distribution to grasp physical movement and changes.

Through those senses, Katsuto detected that a massive physical object, though not as large as a building but sufficient to be gigantic by human standards, had vanished in an instant.

Katsuto had never encountered such a change in phenomenon on such a scale with this degree of stability.

Rather than being threatened by this feeling, curiosity prompted Katsuto to halt searching for people who hadn't fled and leaped towards the scene where matter dissipated.

Seeing that massive body, it was hard to imagine that he was also very adept in high speed Move-Type Magic. Leaving Kirihara behind at the original location, he slid through the sky through his leap and arrived at the outer wall of the resting area thanks to his momentum.

Was this fortunate or unfortunate?

For Mayumi and Mari, this was definitely fortunate.

As to what Katsuto thought himself, there was no way to know without asking him.

Just as he arrived Katsuto was subjected to a warm welcome from the guided missiles.

Katsuto's response was almost pure reflex.

He instantaneously erected several physical barriers that were impermeable to air particles and could handle temperatures exceeding 20000 degrees.

The shock waves from the missiles that mysteriously detonated in mid air didn't even scratch the outer walls covered by Katsuto's barrier.

Katsuto looked in the direction where the shock waves that detonated the missiles came from.

There was an army captain standing on an open top military car carrying something that looked like a missile launcher.

"Super Sonic Launcher...... Are you from 101?"

Katsuto called out towards the military vehicle headed his way. (Although it seemed a little odd, he was still a high school student, so he addressed the adult in a respectful tone.)

The car must be equipped with a fusion mechanical system and slid soundlessly forward until the captain descended with a picturesque smile and saluted Katsuto.

"JSDF 101 Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion, Captain, Sanada Shigeru. As expected of the current head of the Juumonji Family, you do know about us. Please excuse my rudeness."

Katsuto's brow twitched.

Such a simple reaction was exemplary mental fortitude for an 18 year old young man.

"Excuse me. I think both sides have much to discuss."

"...I should be the one apologizing."

"A thousand apologies. Then, my lord heir of the Juumonji Family, let's go inside."

Sanada said as he headed for the conference hall.

Katsuto had no idea what the man needed from him, but since this soldier knew about the hidden family situation surrounding the Juumonji Family, he was not someone Katsuto could let his guard down around.

The two men advanced one after another into the nearest entrance of the conference hall.

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Fujibayashi did not come alone.

Behind her figure decked out in combat fatigues (she was not wearing a dress and brand name shoes but long pants and boots), another man in his prime wearing the uniform of the JSDF with a major's pins came in.

This major came before the bemused Tatsuya, who stood there stiffly, and came to a halt with his hands behind his back.

"Special Lieutenant, your information classification has been temporarily disabled."

Standing by his side, Fujibayashi spoke to Tatsuya.

Confusion vanished from Tatsuya's face as he came to attention and saluted the man in front of him.

At that pose, everyone besides Miyuki, including the recently entered Katsuto, could only gape in shock.

The soldier returned Tatsuya's salute, saw Katsuto's figure, and walked towards him.

"I am JSDF Major Kazama Harunobu. I apologize for being unable to reveal my unit."

Sanada already reported their unit designation earlier, so Kazama only said this because he was aware that Mayumi and Erika might hear this.

"So you must be that Major Kazama. I am the Juumonji Family's representative to the Master Clan Conference, Juumonji Katsuto."

In response to Kazama's self introduction, Katsuto also revealed the name known throughout the world of Magicians.

Kazama saluted and turned to place both Katsuto and Tatsuya into his line of sight.

"Fujibayashi, please explain to everyone the current situation."

"Yes, sir. Currently, our forces stationed at Tsuchiya are engaging the enemy invaders. Also, we have battalions advancing from Tsurumi and Fujisawa. The Kantou branch of the Magic Association has also formed volunteers to aid in the defense."

"Thank you. Then, Special Lieutenant."

After issuing a concise thank you to Fujibayashi, Kazama called out "Special Lieutenant" as he turned to Tatsuya.

"We have just received orders. Owing to special circumstances, our unit that was originally advancing to Tsuchiya are also to aid in the defensive effort. Under special assignment regulations of the JSDF, you are also mobilized."

Mayumi and Mari both opened their mouths but Kazama silenced them both with a look.

"The JSDF requests and requires that everyone here keep the Special Lieutenant's position confidential. This is a classified secret concerning national defense, so please understand."

Compared to the severe words and solemn tone, the strength of that gaze was sufficient to cause Mayumi, Mari, and Kanon to abandon all resistance.

"Special Lieutenant, the Mobile Suit you designed has already been prepared on the trailer. Let's hurry."

Tatsuya nodded at Sanada's words and briefly turned to his friends.

"My apologies, but it's just as you heard. Everyone head to the shelter with the senpais."

"Special Lieutenant, my squad and I will provide protection for everyone here."

Fujibayashi added in her two cents to Tatsuya as he bowed his head to his friends.

Although their numbers were few, Tatsuya was deeply appreciative that she was able to delegate precious assets for his friends and to the major for doing his utmost to accommodate him.

"Thank you, Lieutenant."

"Understood. Do your best out there, Special Lieutenant."

Saluting Fujibayashi, Tatsuya followed Kazama outside.

Setting aside the peers he apologized to, Tatsuya didn't mention anything about the upperclassmen. Maybe it was because they could read the atmosphere or simply out of shock, but no one called out to Tatsuya regardless of whether they were his peers or upperclassmen.

"Onii-sama, please hold."

However, his sister Miyuki called out to him, a myriad of emotions warring across her face.

Reading the inquisitive look from Tatsuya, Kazama nodded and left first.

Miyuki stood before Tatsuya and stretched her hands out towards his face.

Her aim was not to detain him.

Miyuki knew about his standing and duties just as well as Tatsuya himself.

What Miyuki feared most was to get in Tatsuya's way.

Currently, there was an objective that Miyuki sought to accomplish.

She did not possess the authority to do so.

Yet Miyuki opted to bear the full responsibility on her own discretion. She already made up her mind to remove her brother's shackles.

Tatsuya read that determination from his sister's eyes.

Greeting his sister's upraised gaze, Tatsuya's expression was bewildered, understanding and grateful as he nodded before falling to one knee before Miyuki. —Just as a knight bows before his princess.

Miyuki held that face in both hands and lifted her brother's face, whose eyes were closed, towards herself.

Miyuki bent at the waist.

And bestowed upon her brother's forehead,

A deep kiss.

After his sister's lips departed, the hands pressed against his face fell away and Tatsuya bowed his head once more.

Transformation descended immediately.

A violent array of photons, enough to sear the eyes, burst from Tatsuya's body.

These were no photons, but psions wrapped in physical light.

Tatsuya opened his eyes and rose to his feet.

Staggeringly active psions coursed around him.

The conqueror has come, armored by the storms and commanding lightning.

Although that violent array of light retracted, the voluminous psions still swirled calmly around him.

Anyone would have lurched one or two steps away from Tatsuya, but Miyuki only smiled benignly, lifted her dress and dropped into a deep curtsey.

"May you conquer all before you."

"I'm off."

With his sister's emotional eyes watching him, Tatsuya stepped onto the Yokohama streets that had been transformed into a battlefield and went off to war.

Chapter 11

The conflict between the group of First High students and faculty (including outside personnel) that headed for the shelter via the underground tunnel and the armed guerrillas in the tunnel drew to a close.

The number of evacuees totaled nearly 60 people.

Since that attack came after First High's presentation came to an end, the number of students who came to show their support had reached a peak.

Azusa mentally lamented this unfortunate turn of events, but as the Student Council President, she had to put on a brave front no matter what happened.

Ahead of them was the sound of gunfire and shock waves.

That was the sound of Sawaki taking down the enemy guerrilla armed with guns at the forefront.

Under everyone's combined efforts, the primary weapons such as assault rifles and semi-automatics had been successfully nullified.

Azusa also used magic to solidify the air in the muzzle to cause an explosion that took out two guns and their respective users.

The result lay before her eyes.

Despite being a tunnel, this wasn't a hole excavated in the previous century. There were plenty of lights illuminating the way.

Along the bloodsoaked underground passage, several irregulars lay on the ground.

Normally, she would try to avoid looking at this tragic sight. However, out of duty as the student representative, Azusa forcibly stifled her terror.

She had no experience in magic combat skills or tactical squad command.

Even if she didn't say anything, the security personnel selected from the Club Activities Group and Public Moral Committee wouldn't allow any guerrilla to approach their group.

Azusa fought down the bile rising in her throat and beheld Hattori and Sawaki arriving to rout the guerrillas. All she could do was watch them with her eyes, such was her duty.

Likely because of the sparse number of enemies, there were fortunately no fatalities on their side.

However, Magicians were not immortal.

They will bleed if cut, die if shot.

Magic defenses were not omnipotent either. If the bullet's kinetic energy surpassed magic's ability to alter the Eidos, then the magic barrier would be penetrated.

They endured that sort of risk to serve as our living shields. She believed that to turn her eyes away from these comrades who protected individuals like herself who were inept in combat would be a betrayal of the highest order.

Azusa carefully scrutinized Sawaki as he used his fists and feet to take down the guerrillas that swarmed from all directions as well as Hattori who stood behind him to provide covering fire with magic.

The guerrillas who burst out from cover were also crushed by Sawaki effortlessly.

Their opponents were irregulars of East-Asian descent, so there was no way to immediately tell them apart from normal civilians.

Anyone holding a large weapon like an assault rifle could immediately be identified as hostile, but guerrillas that stalked forward with hidden combat knives or combat knives were hard to differentiate from the average civilian. Hence Sawaki abandoned any and all attempts at telling them apart.

He fortified his defenses and struck down anyone who raised a hand at him.

He was only able to rely on this rough strategy because of the superlative sturdiness of his defenses.

Convergence Move-Type Combination Magic "Air Armor".

Setting the first 3-5 centimeters of air around his body as the target, he rendered the surface of his skin to be smoother and lowered the angle of physical penetration so he could avoid high speed bullets with low mass.

This was not solely magic or physical skills, but a combination of the two which produced the speed and technique necessary to carry out this practically suicidal strategy.

A newly appeared enemy swung a broadsword at him.

Repeatedly activating magic, Sawaki cast personal acceleration magic on himself.

The speed of his fists approached sonic speed.

Surrounded by compressed air, his fist broke the sound barrier.

With a boom, the guerrilla went flying.

This sort of overkill successfully impeded fresh enemies.

Earlier, repeated threats appeared to serve no effect.

Still, just as physical stamina is limited, human inner strength is also limited. Sawaki's blow caused the soldier to collide with the irregular behind him, forcing both of them to collide solidly with the wall and slide to the ground. Seeing this, the guerrillas' morale finally started to crumble.

As Sawaki disengaged the magic armor, his ill-natured classmate was hurtling steam blocks charged with electricity at the fleeing enemy presence.

◊ ◊ ◊

Fujibayashi's squad had two all-terrain vehicles and there were eight people including Fujibayashi. Although the unit was small enough to barely rate as a squad, every member looked highly competent.

"Mayumi, I'm sorry to say...... That I cannot accommodate everyone on board."

With an apologetic expression, Fujibayashi informed Mayumi, who appeared to be awed by each soldier's battle hardened aura.

"Ah, no, we originally decided to evacuate on foot......"

"Is that right. But wouldn't that be too far, and where do you plan to evacuate towards?"

She was speaking to Mayumi and not Katsuto because they were old acquaintances, but Mayumi earnestly wished that she was discussing this with Katsuto. Under these conditions, Katsuto undoubtedly would field the questions better than she would.

"The unit from Tsuchiya is using Nogeyama as a base and are engaged in sweeping for guerrillas in squads.

We still cannot ascertain what the camouflaged vessel in the hillside docks is up to, but they'll probably unload mechanized forces soon. This way, the shoreline will turn into the center of the battlefield, so I recommend that you evacuate inland."

"Then...... As we planned, I think the shelter near the station will probably be better."

Mayumi said in slight bewilderment as she glanced at Katsuto.

"Agreed. That would be preferable."

Seeing Katsuto nod in assent, Mayumi let out a relieved expression.

At this, Fujibayashi smiled with slight interest, but this action went undetected, even by Mayumi.

"Then we will provide cover with the car in front, so just follow along at your own pace."

After saying this, Fujibayashi approached one of the vehicles with Mayumi and Mari right behind her.

"Lieutenant Fujibayashi."

However, Katsuto didn't move and called out to Fujibayashi from behind.

"What is it?"

Fujibayashi didn't delay and immediately turned around.

As if she expected to be called on to stop.

"I know this is a rather willful request, but can you lend me a car?"

That's insane, all the students from First High thought when they heard this. There were only two cars. Also, the cars were not only for carrying people but also for storing ammunition as well.

"Where do you want to go?"

This was not the time to allow independent action. Still, Fujibayashi did not immediately reject Katsuto's request and asked him the reason for this course of action.

"To the side branch of the Magic Association. Although I'm only a surrogate, I am still a representative of the Master Clans Conference and must fulfill my responsibilities as a member of the Magic Association."

That was a voice from the depths of his abdomen. Unlike the shallow youngsters with heroic fantasies, his voice was the voice of someone who was resolved to carry his burdens.

"Understood."

Fujibayashi replied frankly.

"Sergeant Tateoka, Corporal Otowa. Escort Juumonji to the Kantou branch of the Magic Association."

With no regard to Katsuto's bewilderment, she gave orders to two subordinates and lent him a car. Next, she raised her voice towards Mayumi and company as they stood next to the other vehicle.

"Quick, get on board. We can't let you guys waste any more time."

◊ ◊ ◊

The representatives and supporters from Third High elected to use the bus that carried them here for evacuation.

"Why is it so far......"

"That's just how the street is designed; what can you do?"

The bus was waiting in a parking garage reserved for large vehicles that was far from the conference hall. Hearing Masaki's complaints, Kichijouji seriously scolded him.

The very fact that they decided not to stay the night and arranged for the driver to wait on station ahead of time was worthy of cheer.

In terms of distance it was slightly closer than heading for the docks where the evacuation ship was, so Kichijouji felt that complaining about this sort of thing would invite divine retribution.

What was concerning was that the southern side of the parking garage was significantly closer to the docks where the camouflaged enemy vessel was moored. However, the militant students of Third High encouraged one another with ideas of "sticking it to the treacherous invaders" as they advanced.

Apparently, they were enraged that they had been forced to disarm (?) earlier on stage.

This overly optimistic cheer only served to deepen Kichijouji's unease.

Although they were known as the militant Third High, the only ones with real combat experience were a handful of students with Masaki at the head.

He himself had no "real combat" experience, and the faculty leading this team all specialized in research.

In this world, if something could go wrong, it would.

In the middle of the previous century, a certain man coined this rather unpleasant law which Kichijouji felt applied to this situation (in reality, the law became mainstream in the latter half of the century).

Just as they entered the parking garage and the large bus came into view.

—The bus suffered several direct hits from rocket launchers.

Fortunately, the point of impact — maybe the sole blessing in disguise — was near the rear of the vehicle, so the driver was able to frantically escape before being caught in the explosion.

The body of the vehicle was covered with the same heat and shock resistant plating used to coat military vehicles, so while the windows were cracked and several areas were burnt, the body itself was not compromised.

Except the tires, which were completely shredded.

"Those assholes!"

Next to Kichijouji, Masaki was furious.

In order to quickly get him to calm down, Kichijouji switched gears.

If they were to change tires, they couldn't allow the enemy to close in during this time.

He decided to let his good friend vent a little.

Kichijouji left Masaki's side and moved towards the teacher leading this group.

"Sensei."

"Kichijouji, what is it?"

With that slightly shaking voice, it was quite impressive that the man managed to steady himself.

If he wasn't assured of his friend's overwhelming might, he too might be in the same condition.

"Leave the enemy to Masaki; let's prepare to change the tires."

"But, even if you say prepare......"

"This is a designated parking garage for large vehicles and specialized cars. I believe there should be tools for simple maintenance and spare tires as well."

"Y-You're right! OK, everyone with nothing to do help Kichijouji search for spare tires!"

Having everyone with nothing to do join in was because there were other people who could engage the enemy besides Masaki.

Unrelated to his identity as a Year 1 student, Kichijouji naturally controlled the initiative here given his status as the calmest individual present. The students from Third High, regardless of whether they were classmates or upperclassmen, moved together with the teachers along Kichijouji's instructions to prepare for evacuation.

◊ ◊ ◊

The group led by Azusa (which was a slightly inaccurate description) that included students from First High, faculty, and other associated individuals, reached the underground shelter slightly later than the other schools.

The reason for their tardiness was because they had more people to account for.

They had over 60 people. Normally, this wasn't a large number. Yet trying to bring everyone to a certain location without misplacing a single one required a lot of effort, and coupled with the fact they had to fend off hostile attacks along the way, their superior numbers were both an advantage and a disadvantage.

The main entrance that allowed access to the outside during crises had been closed out of consideration of the enemy's presence.

The lock must be disengaged by the evacuees already in the shelter's interior.

While the door was being opened, Hattori and Sawaki were checking for stragglers in the plaza (the underground area was constructed as a plaza) before the front entrance.

The faculty were also fulfilling their duties as adults. Asuka was examining the injured, Haruka was comforting the uneasy students, while Tsudzura was at the rear with Tomitsuka on guard.

Thus, maybe this was the reason — why Tsudzura discovered the abnormality first.

"Everyone, get down and cover your head!"

There was an odd noise coming from the ceiling of the underground passage.

The concrete creaked and groaned.

The overhanging lights went out, plunging the tunnel into darkness.

Cracks appeared all over the ceiling and walls.

All of this happened in an instant.

There were some who screamed in fright.

There were others who just ducked and sought cover.

Still others attempted to hold off the falling metal, concrete and dust with magic.

Nonetheless, no matter what power caused this, the tunnel's collapse appeared unavoidable.

At this time, Azusa was using the terminal responsible for communicating with the people in the shelter to ask them to hurry up and open the door.

Hearing Tsudzura's warning, she couldn't help but turn her head, and now she couldn't tear her eyes away from the tragedy unfolding before her.

There wasn't even time to close her eyes as the ceiling buckled and the walls started peeling off.

She didn't have to worry about being caught in the cave-in.

Even though she was standing outside the door, the shelter's entrance was covered in reinforced metal alloy.

But the other students were......

"......Eh?"

However, after the dust settled, she used the remaining lights from the air raid shelter passage to survey the wreckage of the tunnel, but her eyes were not filled to the brim with painful tears. Instead, a shocked voice erupted due to this unexpected scenery.

None of the First High students were buried alive.

The concrete scraps were formed into a dome-like shape.

What sort of pure coincidence could enable large concrete blocks to perfectly lock together to form a dome shape that held enough room beneath for half a person's height?

No, this cannot be pure coincidence......

The probability that this was a naturally occurring phenomenon was practically zero.

(......I see, this is Polyhedra Handle! That's Tsudzura-sensei's magic!)

The "Polyhedra Handle" she was mentally calling out did not refer to the command used to describe 3-D projections, but magic that broke up physical objects into pyramids and quadratic prisms and manipulated them to form these simple projections to form large scale construct variations.

Modern magic did not excel in manipulating one aspect of an object. In order to halt the underground passage from caving in, the typical approach was to set the entire underground passage as the target.

On the other hand, Polyhedra Handle split one object into multiple components and sought to alter one component in order to affect the entire whole.

Of course, this required the ability to separate one object into multiple tiny pieces. Magicians capable of doing so could consciously create miracles when it would be impossible otherwise. —Just like now.

Likely understanding that the underground tunnel was unable to support the weight above and collapse was imminent, Tsudzura used the sand's pressure to form a dome and controlled the impact of the falling rubble.

Nevertheless, at the end of the day this was only a temporary measure formed of concrete and did not possess the sturdiness of natural stone.

"Everyone, get over here quickly!"

Azusa desperately cried out to the students, faculty, and third party individuals still sprawled on the floor and urged them to quickly flee through the shelter's opened doors.

Asuka had left to care for the wounded, so Hirakawa was left all by herself in the 60 man group and she could only hunker down without even making a peep.

True, the ceiling did collapse. The walls should have fallen. If that was the case, why wasn't she buried alive?

Slowly opening her eyes in trepidation, Hirakawa was shocked out of her senses by the scene before her.

Steel and concrete mixed together like toys to form a dome with a small opening. This impossible coincidence caused Hirakawa to stare blankly.

But, just then,

"What are you staring at!? Get moving!"

Amid the scolding, someone grabbed her hand.

She gave a start out of panic and tried to fling away that hand on reflex.

However, that hand gave Hirakawa a feeling of warmth without pain and contained a strength that refused to relinquish the grip on her hand.

"Come on!"

Without minding her reflexive rejection, that hand pulled her onward.

Behind them, there were no human sounds or presence. While she was staring blankly, she had become the only one left behind.

Ahead, a weak light shone the way forward, probably caused by people who had already fled the debris and turned a flashlight back this way.

At this point, Hirakawa's brain wasn't even functioning. She was only being led by her hand and running as fast as she could despite her bent posture.

The light at the end of the tunnel continued to grow stronger until they could finally see the exit.

An unspecified sound reached her ear.

Part of the debris was unable to sustain the weight and was beginning to collapse.

The catastrophe played out in slow motion before her eyes.

The young man pulling Hirakawa tugged that hand clasping Hirakawa into his bosom while using his empty right hand to pat the right side of her waist. Suddenly, Hirakawa noticed that her body was being pulled along with the charge.

In front of the hand holding her tight, Hirakawa subconsciously clung onto the chest in front of her.

By the time Hirakawa realized that this was the inertia caused by emergency acceleration, they had already escaped the falling debris into the shelter's passageway.

Seeing Tomitsuka successfully rescue the young girl who hadn't fled in time, Azusa finally let out a sigh of relief.

Yet, upon seeing the young girl's face, her recently settled heart suddenly pounded furiously again.

(Hirakawa-senpai's younger sister......)

As a member of the Technician Team for the Nine Schools Competition, Azusa enjoyed a close relationship with Hirakawa Koharu.

The cultured and refined older Hirakawa was an upperclassman whom Azusa got along well with, and at the same time, she was a senpai who excelled in the same technical field.

When Azusa first heard that her sister attempted to sabotage the representative team's work, Azusa initially suspected that she had misheard it.

She had never met the younger sister directly, but based on the understanding reached from casual conversation, Azusa didn't believe she was the sort of girl to do such a thing. Hence she was hit doubly hard by this.

Seeing her frantically separate herself from the young man who carried her in his embrace and dropping her head in shame while sneaking a peek at the young man, she looked like any other ordinary underclassman.

Hopefully, this will enable her to wake up from this nightmare...... Azusa herself prayed that this would be so.

Barely averting being buried alive at the eleventh hour, Hirakawa let out a sigh of relief near the sturdy ceiling covered with metallic alloy.

And finally had the leisure to discover her current posture.

"!"

Was that a record setting reflex action? Hirakawa thought as she successfully sank into panic. The reason why she was successful was likely because she didn't enter a state of panic but was already submerged in one.

At any rate, her limbs started moving first before she sprang away from the young man embracing her. Too ashamed to raise her head, but at the same time, she was highly curious as to what he looked like.

In the end, she kept her head lowered while secretly sneaking peeks at the boy's face, but this suspicious action did not seem to dwell on the young man's mind.

"Are you OK? Then please go ahead."

A voice that cared for her.

For Hirakawa, it seemed like an eternity since she had heard someone say something like that. Between taking advantage of others and being seen as a "collaborator", mutual care was nonexistent. After her mission's failure and her subsequent capture, everything she heard sounded like a scolding.

But this young man naturally expressed worry on her behalf...... For some reason, this was the feeling she got.

"Ah, wait."

Hirakawa went through the door — and involuntarily clutched at the one who watched her and led her here — the young man's shirt.

"Well...... Thank you......"

Right now, those words were all she could manage.

"Hm? You're welcome."

Once the young man (at this point, Hirakawa wasn't aware of Tomitsuka's name) naturally accepted her words, Hirakawa amazingly felt overjoyed.

◇ ◇ ◇

Under the guidance of Fujibayashi's subordinates, Mayumi's party arrived at the plaza before the station that led to the underground shelter and were shocked speechless by the terrible scene before them.

The entire plaza had collapsed.

On top, there was a gigantic metal block walking around.

"Bipedal tanks...... Where the heck did they get that!?"

This appeared to be an unexpected enemy for Fujibayashi as well, judging from the surprised tone of her voice.

It was a humanoid walking, firing platform that was covered in armored plates made of metallic alloy.

The bottoms of the short, stubby legs were equipped with treads and walking devices while the body was shaped like a small car with a single seat and was equipped with all sorts of weapons. There were also two long, mechanical arms, but there was no head.

The robot had a total height of 3.5 meters, shoulder height approximately 3 meters, width 2.5 meters, and length 2.5 meters. The weapon was originally developed by Eastern Europe to annihilate infantry in urban settings.

And there were two of them.

Fully loaded and with the pilot aboard, the total weight was approximately 8 tons. Still, if that was all there was, it was highly unlikely that they could have collapsed the reinforced road.

The underground shelter or maybe the tunnel must have suffered some sort of attack from the bipedal tanks.

"Take this!"

"Kanon, using 'Mine Genesis' will cause too much trouble!"

After recovering her wits, Kanon was fired up and ready to unleash her magic, but was stopped by Isori grabbing her wrist.

With the underground situation uncertain, there was a high possibility that using surface oscillation magic might worsen the tragedy.

"I won't use that!"

Shaking off Isori's hand, Kanon was about to activate her magic.

Just as she took aim at the targets,

—Not only were they shot to pieces, they were also covered in white frost.

"Ah......"

"As expected of Mayumi and Miyuki. We don't even have time to do anything."

Standing next to Kanon as she stared blankly, Fujibayashi offered her praise while chuckling wryly. Mayumi was a little embarrassed whereas Miyuki only offered a smile of her own as the two of them bowed.

"......The group that went through the underground tunnel appears to be fine. No trace of anyone buried beneath the rubble."

Mikihiko was the one who made that report. After closing his eyes and wearing an expression that indicated part of his mind was elsewhere, he had sent one of his five senses with the spirits to investigate.

"Is that so. Since someone from the Yoshida Family said so, that must be the case. Good work."

"No, that's hardly a praiseworthy achievement."

At Fujibayashi's compliment, Mikihiko hurriedly opened his eyes and answered back.

Looks like all the members who delighted in poking fun at innocent teenagers had gathered together.

"—So, what do we do next?"

Erika was the one who offered the next practical question.

Seeing that Fujibayashi didn't waver in the slightest at this slightly combative tone, she truly had the maturity of an adult.

"Given that bipedal tanks have advanced this far, the situation must have worsened more than we imagined. From my perspective, I recommend evacuating to the base camp at Nogeyama."

"But isn't that one of the enemy's primary attacking targets?"

"Mari, any enemy attacking now won't differentiate between combat personnel and civilians. The danger will not decrease in the slightest even if you split off from the military. Rather, I'd say it would be even more dangerous."

Mayumi gently denied Mari's argument.

"Then, Saegusa-senpai, should we head for Nogeyama?"

Isori asked the obvious question.

However, Mayumi shook her head.

"I plan to call in transport helicopters for civilians who haven't managed to evacuate in time."

As Mayumi said this, her gaze turned towards the station. There, staring at the ruined entrance to the air shelter in despair, were countless civilians just standing there, and the number kept growing.

"First, the wreckage needs to be removed to ensure a safe landing zone. I plan to stay here until the helicopters arrive. Mari, take everyone and evacuate with Kyoko."

"What are you saying!? You want to remain here alone!?"

At this thoroughly unexpected response, of course Mari had a huge reaction.

Yet Mayumi's reply was resolute.

"This is the duty of those who bear the name of the Ten Master Clans, Mari. We enjoy all sorts of privileges thanks to the name of the Ten Master Clans.

Although this country does not officially have an aristocracy, in reality, we as the Ten Master Clans enjoy a degree of freedom outside the bounds of law. As a price for these privileges, we are required to contribute our power during times like this."

"—Then I will remain behind as well."

Determination was embedded in Mayumi's words — or maybe it was resignation. Yet the one who replied in place of Mari was Isori.

"I too, am a member of the Hundred Families who benefited from the government."

"If Kei stays, then I do too! I am also from the Hundred Families!"

"Then, I as well. At the very least, I'm a daughter of the Chiba Family."

"Likewise. Onii-sama is engaged in battle, I cannot stand by and do nothing."

"M-Me too!"

"I will contact my father to arrange for company helicopters."

"I am not of the Ten Master Clans or the Hundred Families...... But since all the girls from the lower grades are staying behind, how can I slink away with a tail between my legs?"

"Me too. I have confidence in my own skills."

"I shall stay as well. Although I do not have Erika-chan, Kirihara-kun, or everyone's might, allow me to make my amends."

"The Yoshida Family is not of the Hundred Families...... But we are also recipients of preferential treatment."

"Well, I don't have any power, but at least I can serve as everyone's 'eyes'......"

"......The underclassmen all want to stay, how can we just flee?"

"Indeed. I'm uneasy at leaving Mayumi behind by herself. Maybe there will be something Mayumi unexpectedly overlooked."

"I say......"

After Suzune's comment, Mayumi finally voiced her objection,

"Speaking of which...... I guess everyone here is an idiot too......"

This was no act. This was Mayumi honestly sighing in "despair", her beautiful face filled with resignation as she turned back to Fujibayashi.

"It's just as you heard. Seriously, my children are all so willfully disobedient...... I apologize for not being able to take up your kind offer."

Seeing Mayumi bow deeply in apology and the group behind her avert their eyes like miscreants, Fujibayashi appeared to be very serious on the surface, but inwardly she found this to be highly interesting.

"No, they're quite trustworthy. Allow me to leave a few subordinates behind."

"No, there's no such need!"

That voice did not come from the crowd of First High students but came from behind Fujibayashi instead.

"Inspector?"

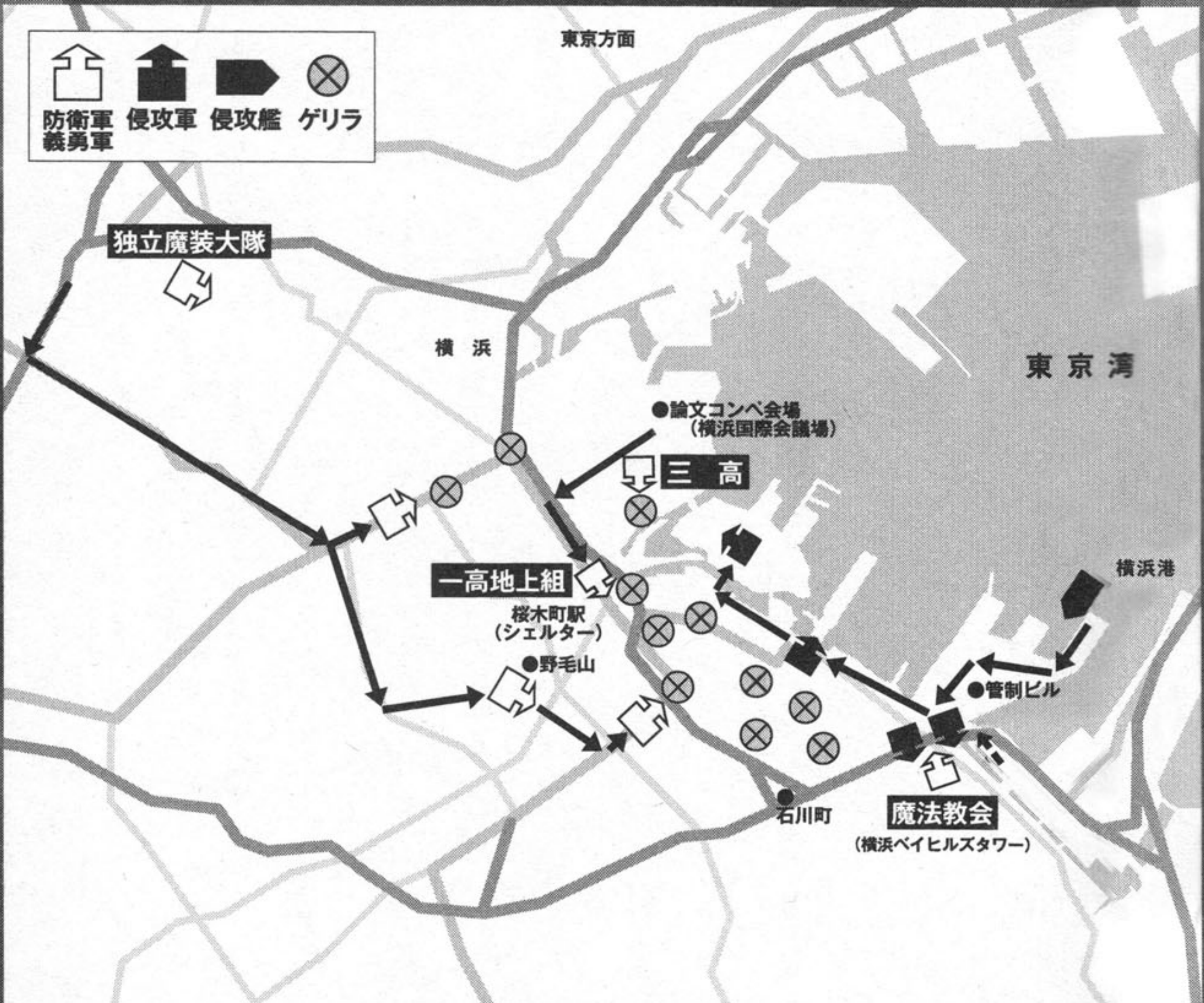
"Toshi-nii?"

Two different names for the same person.

Inspector Chiba turned to face Fujibayashi, who had referred to him as "Inspector".

"Just as the military's duty is to repel the invader, it is the police's task to safeguard civilians. We will remain here. Fujibayashi...... Ahem, Lieutenant Fujibayashi, please rendezvous with your unit."

横浜事変
概略図
2


東京方面
防衛軍 義勇軍
侵攻軍
侵攻艦
ゲリラ
独立魔装大隊
横　浜
東 京 湾
●論文コンペ会場
（横浜国際会議場）
三　高
一高地上組
桜木町駅
（シェルター）
●野毛山
横浜港
●管制ビル
石川町
魔法教会
（横浜ベイヒルズタワー）
横須賀方面

西暦2095年10月30日
午後4時 現在

"Understood. Inspector Chiba, I leave this in your hands."

This superb entrance was coupled with a suitably dramatic declaration.

Yet Fujibayashi didn't even react to this as she saluted smartly and departed swiftly.

"Hm......What a wonderful woman."

"Ha, dream on. She's not the type of woman who'll fall into Toshi-nii's hands."

Unfortunately, the words he mumbled to himself were mercilessly dashed by his sister's retort, causing Inspector Chiba to truly stand there "speechlessly".

◊ ◊ ◊

In the parking garage reserved for large cars and special vehicles where Third High students were locked in combat with irregulars, approximately half of them were unable to join in the fighting. —Because they were emptying out the contents of their stomach.

"Ichijou, can't you hold back a little!"

"You too senpai, please retreat."

The culprit was Masaki, not that he cared about the reprimand.

He was pointing a handgun-shaped Specialized CAD stained in the scent of blood at the guerillas of unknown nationality.

A blood red flower bloomed, and sprinkled down.

Oomph, the sound of another person covering their mouth traveled to Masaki's ears.

Every time he killed a man, both his side's and the enemy's morale dropped a bit.

(If this is enough to terrify you, you should never have stepped onto the battlefield in the first place.)

Regardless of how those eyes perceived him or what words were directed towards him, Masaki coldly ignored them all.

His perspective was correct. Indisputably correct.

However — how many soldiers could calmly witness human bodies rupturing and blood (more like red blood cells) scattering like dust?

The Ichijou Family's secret technique, "Rupture".

Magic that was able to instantaneously vaporize fluids within a physical object.

When used on humans, blood would vaporize and the subsequent pressure would tear through muscle and skin. Red blood cells, which made up the majority of the composition of blood, would then scatter outwards like a crimson flower that was blooming.

Besides a select minority, his classmates and upperclassmen found out for the first time what it meant to be known as "Crimson".

◊ ◊ ◊

From the other side, which was the command center located on the bridge of the camouflaged amphibious vessel that successfully launched their surprise attack, the area was covered in an atmosphere which was radically different than one of complete success.

"We lost communication with the unit sent to the underground shelter. There is also no reply from the bipedal tanks."

The Commanding Officer(CO) of the unit, who was also the captain of the camouflaged amphibious vessel, had a sour look on his face when he received the signal officer's report. His original plan called for the infiltrated operatives to take hostages before he committed the mechanized troops.

However, the losses of the plainclothes operatives greatly exceeded initial estimates. This was especially true for the squads sent to the international conference center and the parking garage for large vehicles, where casualties were heavy. The captain judged the strategy that called for their feint to allow the operatives to do the majority of the work regretfully needed a little reworking.

"Allow the mechanized troops to land!"

He gave the order to launch the bipedal tanks and APCs manufactured in their own country.

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"......So? Why is Toshi-nii here?"

In a corner of the plaza before the station, the Chiba siblings were putting on a not-quite-warm reunion (?) act. (The older brother was quite happy, so maybe a reunion was not incorrect.)

As for why they were in the "corner", that was because neither Erika nor Toshikazu were adept at cleaning up the bipedal tanks' wreckage, interrogating the captured pilots, or clearing the area so the helicopters could land. —Although saying that the currently active Inspector Toshikazu was "inept at interrogation" was a problem in its own right.

At any rate, that was the reason why the two of them were loitering (in defense of their honor, Kirihara and Sayaka were doing the same).

Still, at least Toshikazu didn't mind that he didn't really contribute much to this situation — Inagaki was — so he was enjoying this verbal spar with his little sister, who stood there with both hands on her hips.

"The fact that you ask me why thoroughly saddens me. Is there anything strange with a kindhearted older brother wanting to help out his dear little sister?"

"Kindhearted!? You have a lot of gall saying those hypocritical words......"

"Hey, hey, Erika, a young lady should not use terms like 'gall'."

"You! And now you dare to talk to me like I'm some sort of Ojou-sama. Do you even have the right!?"

"Ah, how terrible...... It's obvious that I love my little sister dearly."

Maybe Toshikazu went too far in feigning silliness, but the excited Erika swiftly calmed down. Seeing his sister's expression change to one that was watching him with cold eyes, Toshikazu sighed as if bored.

"At least my coming to help is definitely true."

Toshikazu said this with a bored expression and indolent tone, but upon seeing his sister sneer at him, he suddenly wore a mischievous smirk.

"Is that the right attitude, Erika?"

"What do you mean?"

Erika's expression wilted slightly. The other person is stronger, that was the impression — an uncomfortable feeling she didn't know how to handle since her early childhood years and wasn't something that could be easily erased.

"I brought something nice for you."

"Something nice? I don't want something like that."

Even so, Erika still held out — stubborn and refusing to capitulate. Chiba Toshikazu was one of two people that Erika would never surrender to.

Not only was this something Toshikazu approved of, this was also something his sister always aimed for since her childhood.

"Don't be like that. Today, this is something you absolutely need."

For Toshikazu, "Little Erika" was the cute little sister whom anyone wanted to tease. Now, she was standing much stronger and cuter than before. "Let's just end it here," he said with with mischievous thoughts running through his head as he brought out a long, curved object from the cargo truck.

Seeing the silhouette, Erika was at a loss for words.

Removing the thin outer covering, Toshikazu handed the odachi to Erika.

The entire length ran 180 cm and was even longer than Erika's height.

Just the blade alone was 140 cm long.

For a tachi the curvature was too shallow, making it an unnatural shape—

"Orochimaru? Why is that here......?"

"Why? What a ridiculous question, Erika. Orochimaru is the blade forged to use 'Yamatsunami', and you are the only who can perform 'Yamatsunami'. Neither our father nor Naotsugu can use 'Yamatsunami'. Although they can mimic the form, the only one who can 'truly use' that is you. In other words, Orochimaru exists for you to wield."

Erika's hands shook as she accepted the odachi.

She tightly gripped this weight that was sufficient to send her swaying back and forth and finally stopped shivering.

The Chiba Family forged the strongest weapons. Just like Ikazuchimaru, this was the pinnacle of sword-type armament forged by the Chiba Family, the secret weapon that was the source of their pride.

Even for the briefest of moments, to be granted the freedom to wield this blade was something Erika never even dared to dream of.

"You look delighted."

Hearing her brother's voice, her head violently rose.

The earlier resistance she bore towards her brother had vanished. Erika's entire being was focused on Orochimaru.

If she had to say why, that was because this sword—

"Are you that happy to hold the beloved sword you see as an extension of yourself, Erika? Hm...... So that's the case. No matter what our father or Naotsugu think, Erika, you are a true daughter of the Chiba Family."

"......Hmph! I'll say thank you this time."

"That's why young ladies should be so brusque......"

Without waiting for Toshikazu to finish, Erika turned and left.

Seeing Erika prance away with Orochimaru in her hands, Toshikazu smiled in delight at his sister's easily understood attitude.

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"Do you have any new intel?"

His upper body stuck inside the pilot's seat of the bipedal tank, Isori heard a voice behind him, so he pulled himself out and shook his head.

"No. I'm not very good with weapons and I think this is an older model purchased in the second hand markets. There's no way to identify nationality."

"There are second hand markets for weapons?"

Noticing the shocked expression on Mayumi's face as she asked this question, Isori smiled and nodded his head.

"There are even second hand markets for fighter jets. In small scale conflicts, weapons from the last World War are still seeing service."

Hmph~, despite Mayumi's gentle smile of admiration, Isori felt a rather miffed aura beside him.

At this time, he could tell who that was without even bothering to take a look.

Isori reined in his expression and once again glanced at Mayumi.

"Generally, weapons purchased from second hand markets in allied countries tend to be cheaper. Given that this bipedal tank is manufactured in Eastern Europe, the chance that these guys are operatives from the Great Asian Alliance is quite high...... However, in order to get at their motives, we still need intelligence out of the pilot."

"But, will he just give that up?"

"That depends on Mari's skills."

Mayumi shrugged her shoulders at Kanon's obvious question.

"Then I'm off to clean up the area."

Watching Isori lightly nod and head off with Kanon pressed close against him, Mayumi walked towards where Mari was conducting her interrogation.

Besides slight frostbite on their faces, the two bound pilots showed no signs of external injury.

Inagaki was questioning one of them while Mari handled the other one.

"How is it going?"

Mayumi sidled alongside Mari and simply asked about the situation.

"Silence. If I knew this would happen, I would have brought a stronger perfume......"

Unable to obtain a satisfactory result, Mari was starting to get a little anxious.

"There's nothing we can do about that. Our condition for interrogating Sekimoto today was that all chemicals were forbidden."

Publicly acknowledged as an anti-personnel combat specialist, Mari excelled not only in magic and swordsmanship, but also smaller weapons and even chemical weapons.

One of her favored tactics was to manipulate the air flow to direct pheromones into the enemy's nose.

This evil woman also carried hidden perfume on her that could directly affect her opponent's mental status (which was practically a crime).

Now, she was using this chemical on her bound opponent in a clandestine fashion, but to no avail.

"Well, there's always torture."

"Wait, no matter what we......"

Hearing Mari utter that dangerous phrase, Mayumi hurriedly put a stop to this.

"Relax. I have confidence that I will only cause pain and suffering without leaving any visible injuries."

"That's not what I'm talking about! ......Mari, why don't you take a break?"

"......That's true, I'll catch a quick breather."

She must have realized that she was too highly strung.

Mari waved her hands at Mayumi and moved towards where Suzune sat on a bench with a map unfurled in front of her.

On the floor in front of where Suzune sat on the bench (covered of course), an intricately detailed map was being projected.

Suzune used the terminal to open the map while Honoka refracted light to project it.

This was a detailed map of the local shoreline where they were that stretched from Sakuragi-chō to Sangechō.

There, another projection showed newly added ships, crowds of people, and the scenery of the local streets.

"Ho, how impressive."

"Ah, Watanabe-senpai."

The projection of the map on the ground wobbled slightly, but was quickly restored to a clear image.

The scenes of the street overlapped and matched the map perfectly.

Suzune's fingers flew over the keyboard of the notebook-type terminal. After hitting the last confirmation key, Suzune raised her head.

"Did you learn anything new?"

"Alas, no."

Mari bitterly shook her head at Suzune's inquiry, but her face quickly transformed into an interested expression.

"Looks like you guys got some results."

"Ah. Thanks to Mitsui, we have a good grasp on the enemy forces and direction...... Mitsui, that's enough."

Hearing Suzune's praise, Honoka smiled with embarrassment as she nodded.

At the same time, the map on the ground vanished.

"Even if it's light-controlling magic, isn't it quite rare to see such a fine degree of control?"

"Indeed. I cannot recall anyone who can just use light refraction to create clear images that rival low altitude observation drones. Looks like this is a different type of magic than the average light refraction magic."

Suzune's faint praise caused Honoka's face to redden even further.

"How can that be...... Compared to Tatsuya and Miyuki, my magic is nothing special......"

"No need to be so humble, Mitsui. It's true that both of them possess powerful magic, but based on the situation, there are times when intelligence can control the battlefield even more than firepower."

"Just so, Mitsui. The ability to look down and grasp the situation is a tremendous asset. Since we are cut off from unmanned observation drones and the street level camera system, the contribution from your magic is incredibly meaningful."

"Thank you very much!"

Watching Honoka bow deeply with her entire face flushed, the two Year 3 students revealed gentle smiles.

Recently, they had seen too many thick skinned (?) underclassmen, so occasionally catching a glimpse of an innocent reaction was rather refreshing.

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In order to get from the international conference center to the Magic Association branch headquarters in the Yokohama Bay Hills Tower, taking the route along the coast would be faster, but taking the inland route wasn't that much of a detour either.

The enemy's main force was amphibious troops launched from the combat vessel of unknown nationality. Currently, their troops that had infiltrated the city were also active along the coast.

However, Katsuto shook his head when asked "Should we take the detour?" Not up and down, but left and right.

Immediately afterward, the military vehicle that Katsuto was riding advanced through the crossfire on the street along the coast as it moved towards the Bay Hills Tower by the shortest route possible.

Near the Bay Hills Tower — actually the closer they got to the Hillside Docks — heavy weapons appeared among the enemy. Likewise, the number of mechanized weaponry (bipedal tanks) was also on the rise.

"Rather than saying the enemy's forces are concentrated here, it would be more accurate to say that they are in the process of spreading out."

Sitting in the passenger's seat, Sergeant Tateoka proceeded to explain the situation to Katsuto.

Katsuto wordlessly nodded.

The reason he said nothing was not because he looked down on the low ranking officer, but because he was putting all his concentration on his magic.

Next, on the side of the intersection ahead, a small group of enemies carrying shoulder-mounted rocket launchers appeared.

They weren't plainclothes soldiers. Although they wore no identifying emblems to identify their nationality, they all wore uniform combat fatigues.

This must be their amphibious force.

The squad took aim at the vehicle Katsuto was in and fired four guided anti-tank missiles.

This was practically point blank range.

Even though they were guided missiles with slower initial speed, there was no way the all terrain vehicle was going to dodge them.

However, Corporal Otowa handling the wheel never wavered and Sergeant Tateoka put down the windshield on the passenger's side and propped up an automatic rifle.

The guided missiles detonated in the air five meters in front of the vehicle.

The flames from the explosion enveloped the hemisphere barrier that surrounded the vehicle.

Bullets were fired from within to hit the enemy troops.

Attacks from the outside were unable to penetrate the interior, but attacks from within were unimpeded.

Needless to say, that directed transparent barrier was the result of Katsuto's area magic.

Setting himself as the center of the hemisphere's space, he altered the fabric of the hemisphere to reject heat beyond a certain level and any molecule greater than oxygen.

Even while on board a vehicle moving along at high speed, Katsuto's barrier magic never faltered.

During this short journey, Fujibayashi's subordinates personally experienced what it meant to be called an "Iron Wall".

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While the Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion was designated as a "battalion", their numbers were on the scale of two companies.

Initially for this mission — which was originally to test magitech weapons — they only mobilized 50 men. The two large armored trailers coincidentally carried the perfect number of new equipment.

"—How is it, Special Lieutenant?"

"Just as I expected of you. Quite impressive."

Standing before the racks filled with protective gear that would not look out of place on a knight, Sanada couldn't help but nod in satisfaction.

"The measurements should be perfect. Change quickly."

Sanada urged Tatsuya to strip off all the clothes he was wearing. Although there were female soldiers in the trailer, neither of them paid any attention to that.

On some level, all the soldiers in the Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion were seen as lab rats, so full body examinations weren't anything out of the ordinary. Not only would male soldiers see female soldiers in the nude, the reverse also happened. There was no way someone who was ashamed of something like that would be able to last in this outfit.

Tatsuya deftly put on the special underclothes and immediately put on the black outfit — the Mobile suit.

After tying the broad belt, he snapped every button in place.

Setting the CAD in one of the leather holsters on the belt, he finally put on the mask-like helmet.

"Doesn't appear to be any problems."

"Indeed, all errors are within the acceptable boundaries."

Tatsuya's voice came through the speakers equipped in the trailer's interior. Detecting that the automatic transmission activated, Tatsuya manipulated the helmet and popped the mask.

"Bulletproof, heat resistant, shock resistant, and also resistant to biological and chemical weapons and a simple motion supplement system was added into the design as requested. Of course, the Flying Device was also attached to the belt. When coupled with the shock resistant function, you can completely nullify the recoil when firing, so you can also fire in the air."

"Perfect. Its performance far exceeds my design."

"No, I also enjoyed myself to my heart's content."

Sanada and Tatsuya shook hands. While this was happening, Kazama finally arrived leading two more soldiers.

"Sanada, are you finished?"

Staring wordlessly at the subordinate who saluted in response, Kazama shifted his gaze to Tatsuya.

"Then, effective immediately, the Special Lieutenant is to rendezvous with Yanagi's unit. Yanagi's unit is currently sniping the enemy unit that is approaching the connection bridge to the Mizuho Wharf."

"Captain Yanagi's location is displayed on the protective visor."

"Understood."

Putting the visor back on, Tatsuya verified the location for Yanagi's unit and stepped out of the trailer.

Without using the ramp, Tatsuya jumped off the trailer and hit the button on his waist before his downward acceleration disappeared. That was the power switch for the CAD equipped with Flying-Type Magic.

Lightly tapping off the ground, Tatsuya soared through the sky.

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The unidentified invaders composed of the mechanized unit that landed at the Hillside Wharf split into two groups.

One advanced towards the Magic Association located near the bay.

The other marched along the coast.

The group headed north did not plan to rendezvous with the irregulars locked in combat with Third High, but went in the opposite direction and were preparing to pursue and capture the civilians attempting to flee by sea.

The Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion already controlled that direction.

This was an attacking unit that heavily emphasized mobility with 6 APCs.

Standing before the two lines of APCs that charged straight for the bridge, Captain Yanagi sneered beneath his visor.

He was the archetype anti-personnel combat Magician.

He excelled in reading the enemy's movement pattern, mixing physical skills and magic to lure, amplify or reverse enemy attacks in close combat. There was practically nothing he could do against this armored column — until he joined the Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion.

Since the CO of the Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion was an Ancient Magic user, the majority of the troops in the 101st were also Ancient Magic users, with Yanagi being one of the model Ancient Magic users.

Yanagi, who was able to use magic while in the middle of hacking and slashing, had received a technique that used his body's motions and "shape" to replace a binding seal and was feared because he never left an opening even when operating a CAD.

Still, even he was forced to admit the low practicality of large scale magic on a Specialized CAD that could flip a heavy object which weighed in the dozens of tons.

If he used a seal to replace the ritual needed to activate magic of this scale, the minimum requirement was at least five seconds. That was frankly impossible with the enemy already bearing down on him.

(How unpleasant.)

Although he was complaining mentally, his mouth still wore that wry smile.

Smirking malevolently beneath his visor, Yanagi leaped out from behind cover directly in front of the column of APCs.

Pitch black armor.

One man stood there.

Maybe because they hesitated at the sight of this unexpected enemy, the APC's turret didn't immediately spit fire.

Since there was only one soldier, it might have been that they planned to simply grind the man down beneath their wheels.

The difference in defensive power between an APC and the armor was simply too great.

Yanagi never planned to sit in front of the enemy's cannon for too long.

Clutching the rifle with the bayonet attached — the trigger of the CAD, he verified that the magic was activated before ducking back behind cover.

Suddenly, blocks of earth flew through the air along a straight line as if someone cut a straight line through the ground.

Along this line, the wheels of the APCs left the ground.

The shaking earth gave off a series of groans that told Yanagi the magic's results.

The APC that was tilted off balance crashed into the vehicle alongside it.

Careful scrutiny revealed that all the vehicles on the east flipped over to crush the ones on the west.

Gravity-Type Magic "Thousand Tatami".

By cutting off the Earth's gravity along the north-south axis, this caused the object to tilt from east to west because of the Earth's revolution.

The bottoms of the APCs, the "belly", were facing upwards and were struck by a hail of bullets.

Practically at the same time that Yanagi activated his magic, the squad flying in the sky opened fire.

The Weaponized Integrated CADs in the shape of rifles shot out a stream of bullets with increased penetration that easily drilled holes through the underbelly of the APCs covered in armor designed to withstand mines.

Once the fuel was hit, flames erupted from the underside of the vehicle.

The western group of what appeared to be a routed armored column remained unscathed.

The enemy must have Magicians who excel in "Counter" magic on board the APCs for extra defense.

With the ability to create a barrier strong enough to hold back an object that was dozens of tons, impact from normal weapons would be completely nullified.

Either there was an incredibly strong Magician on board, or they were using some sort of magic booster.

Bullets rained down from the sky again.

The interference strength from the strengthened shots and bullet repulsion magics canceled out one another, causing both magics to fizzle.

The anti-armor bullets hit the APC, but weren't able to completely penetrate through.

The autocannon turret on the APC sprayed the air with large caliber rounds.

Two soldiers were hit and fell to the earth.

Thanks to the armor's bulletproof properties, at least their physical bodies didn't suffer terrible injuries.

Taking stock of the situation from cover, Yanagi once more flew in front of the enemy and continuously hit the trigger three times.

Yanagi's "Thousand Tatami" was a magic that cut off the Earth's gravity and was not something that directly altered the target's Eidos. Thus, the gravity nullifying magic completely ignored the enemy's defensive magic around the vehicle as it activated.

The enemy APC started tilting over.

The shock of the rotation caused the magic barrier surrounding the APC to buckle. After the penetrating rounds fired from the sky hit the armor on the bottom, the remaining three APCs were also devoured by fireballs.

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The speed for Flying-Type Magic depended on the Magician's familiarity and training with this magic. Tatsuya, who designed the magic, probably understood it better than anyone alive. Based on his current flight speed, he would be able to traverse the distance between the trailer that served as a mobile base and Yanagi's unit in a short period of time.

The scenery flew by. While Tatsuya did his utmost to train his eyesight on the move during combat training, trying to do so while flying was never something a human being was supposed to be able to accomplish. Under these conditions, he couldn't overestimate his own physical capabilities. Thus, along with the naked eye, he was using Elemental Sight as a radar to search for obstacles in the air with his consciousness.

He was entirely reliant on that to find those particular things.

The small flying object that only measured 1 meter in length. The pitch black, bird-like flying machine was undoubtedly the low altitude unmanned observation drone. It was currently at the target area — where Yanagi's unit was in combat — and circling overhead. In order to avoid being detected by the drone's magic sensors, Tatsuya flew far above the drone, pulled out a CAD with his right hand, and disengaged the Flying-Type Magic.

Just like that, he plummeted downwards. Just before he made contact with the unmanned drone, Tatsuya activated Decomposition Magic "Mist Dispersal".

The unmanned drone instantly disintegrated into dust and blew away in the air.

Once more activating Flying-Type Magic, Tatsuya prepared to land.

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The sudden loss of the images from the unmanned drone plunged the invasion command center into chaos.

Although the machine that stopped transmitting was not one of a kind, these highly expensive drones did not come with spares. Undoubtedly, they had lost their precious "eyes".

While they appeared to have launched a successful surprise attack on an enemy nation, the reverse was true in that they were also isolated deep within enemy territory. Losing one of the methods to verify the battlefield conditions exerted considerable pressure on them.

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By the time Tatsuya met up with Yanagi, the initial fighting had already died down and Yanagi was in the process of providing medical treatment for the wounded.

"Special Lieutenant, excellent timing."

Before Tatsuya could speak, Yanagi identified his figure and immediately called him over.

After saluting Yanagi smartly, Tatsuya swept a gaze over the wounded whose armor had already been removed.

"We've already removed the bullets. The rest is up to you."

His helm off, Yanagi's exposed face didn't betray any expression, but his eyes betrayed his emotions.

"Understood."

Tatsuya gave a decisive answer that rejected Yanagi's guilt as unnecessary while pulling out the silver CAD from his left waist.

The groans from the wounded ceased immediately. In place of that, Yanagi could hear Tatsuya clenching his teeth behind his closed lips.

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After obtaining an overview of the enemy forces thanks to Honoka's magic, Suzune felt that there were less invading troops than she expected.

"—Don't you think the battle line is too stretched out."

"Now, what was once known as a battle line has ceased to exist."

Suzune answered Mari's question without any hesitation.

"Conflicts are still breaking out throughout the inland areas. Using infiltrated guerrillas to take out transportation and communications while the amphibious forces make a beeline for the suppression targets...... I think that is the basic plan for the invading army."

"If Rin-chan says so, then that must be it...... Then, what is the enemy's objective?"

Not only did Mayumi tilt her head in consideration, even Suzune ruminated on this as well.

"......As Mayumi predicted, one of them must be the Kantou branch for the Magic Association, that much is certain. Another objective is probably aimed at the civilians attempting to flee by sea, probably with taking hostages in mind."

"Hostages?"

"I doubt they are trying to massacre civilians. If that was the case, they would have sent a missile boat rather than a landing vessel. Hostage exchange, ransom...... The final objective remains unclear."

"So that means there is less danger of being suddenly bombarded by cannon fire or guided missiles, correct?"

Suzune mentioned this aloud as she watched the large crowds of civilians gathered near the lobby near the station's ticket stands.

"Earlier, Kyouko said that reinforcements from Tsurumi are almost here. Taking the route into consideration, we should protect the civilians near Mizuho Wharf and then throw any remaining forces into sweeping out the enemy."

"Agreed. I think so too."

Suzune nodded her head at Mayumi's prediction.

"If the enemy's intent is to take hostages, they will definitely come here, where the defenses are weaker...... I will — actually, let's go help Kanon's side first."

"Indeed..... Although their numbers are few, the other side has Miyuki with them."

Mayumi expressed her agreement to Mari's plan of deployment.

"Ah~, that girl's Freezing Magic probably qualifies for combat level."

Mayumi and Mari exchanged wry smiles. They were probably contemplating "those siblings......"

"......Still, Mari, don't push yourself too hard. It's not a good thing for you to face off against mechanized troops."

"I got it."

Watching Mari's figure as she trotted away, the previously silent Honoka who was standing nearby fearfully struck up a conversation with Mayumi.

"Uh, should I join the defenders? If not the front line, I can still offer support from the back."

Honoka must have gathered all of her courage to say that. Mayumi smiled and shook her head from side to side.

"Mitsui needs to be here to help when the helicopters arrive. Also, Miyuki-chan and Kanon-chan's mission is not to defend but to be on guard.

We are not professional combat Magicians, so there's no need to run the risk of combat or seek combat at all. Instead, we should be considering how to escape."

Mayumi warned her in a slightly mischievous tone.

But half of Honoka was certain that Miyuki and Erika would never flee from battle.

She turned an uneasy gaze on Shizuku only to find the same look mirrored in her dear friend's eyes.

The "guard team" Mayumi spoke of — which was really the "defense team" — had split into two groups to defend the two access routes just as Suzune predicted. Just when they were about to reach the point of no return, Kirihara suddenly turned to Sayaka and opened his mouth.

"Mibu...... I think you should head to the rear."

Kirihara's words prompted Sayaka to turn a surprised look on him that practically screamed "Why are you saying this now?"

"Kirihara-kun, I am also a swordsman. I have the resolution to stand on the battlefield."

"Don't go any further!"

At this, Kirihara finally exploded. That was enough to cause Sayaka to just stand there with widened eyes.

"Do not speak of 'resolution' so frivolously!"

"......Kirihara-kun?"

"Kirihara-senpai...... Why are you so angry?"

Sayaka and Erika, who was watching this scene with some amazement, both asked at the same time. After venting, Kirihara relaxed somewhat.

"I...... don't want Mibu's sword to be stained by blood."

Even though she was astonished by these unexpected words, Sayaka couldn't help but form her own rebuttal.

"But...... swords are meant to be......"

"I understand that sort of thing."

—Kirihara cut short whatever she wanted to say.

"Swords are tools men use to make war on each other and, unlike spears and arrows, were the first weapon created to cut humans. So, it is not necessarily wrong to say that a swordsman's hands must be stained by blood."

Kirihara confirmed Sayaka's words. Following that, he called upon a higher "law" to reject it.

"However, kendo was never something that needed live weapons to determine the victor. Is it really a good thing to advance from an athletic activity to a skill for killing?"

Until Kirihara fully calmed down, regardless of whether it was Sayaka or Erika, both could only wordlessly listen to him as he continued.

"I...... In middle school, I always thought that Mibu's sword was wonderful. Her techniques were graceful and her form simply beautiful. There was nothing nefarious in it and it existed solely to train herself in the art of kenjutsu...... No, that is kendo. I am entirely unable to wield such a wondrous sword. At that time, ah, I wished — that her sword would forever hold that beauty and continue to shine forth with that brilliant luster. So...... Well, ach, seriously, how the heck am I supposed to say this!?"

"I understand, senpai."

Seeing Kirihara clutch at his head not knowing how to continue, Erika spoke up in a different tone than before.

"At your match during recruitment week, I saw Sayaka's sword advancing in the correct direction, but I guess Kirihara-senpai thought otherwise. The idea that the true sword is completely different than kendo — probably because I'm different from senpai in that I am more attuned to using a sword to kill people, because I don't think that way."

"Erika-chan......"

Erika's heavy tone caused Sayaka to grow a little concerned. On the other hand, Kirihara stood there in shock and was unable to muster anything in response.

"However, Kirihara-senpai, the ultimate decision rests with Saya."

Erika's sharp eyes pierced through Kirihara's orbs.

"It's true that live combat is entirely different than combat training. There is nothing wrong in Kirihara-senpai not wishing Saya's hands and sword to be dirtied by blood. Yet, Saya is definitely not the sort to allow the target of her affections to charge into danger alone. She would want to fight alongside her beloved."

Both Sayaka and Kirihara blushed at that. Their embarrassment undoubtedly arose from the term "beloved". Still, this wasn't the time and place to express their affections, so both of them held themselves in check.

"......Oops, I think I said something I shouldn't have."

Even Erika was getting a little bashful, so she was in no position to say anything about Kirihara and Sayaka.

"I think this third wheel is going to quit the field. You two can discuss how best to proceed from here."

Erika quickly left the area.

After calming down, Sayaka and Kirihara both exchanged a glance.

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Without any way to access a bird's eye view of the situation, Masaki and Kichijouji of Third High had no way of knowing that the enemy force wasn't very large.

The sum total of the enemy's forces included the amphibious vessel disguised as a large cargo ship (pretty much a transport for land forces) and the irregulars who infiltrated ahead of time. Also, their goal was to seize objectives rather than prepare for a massive invasion.

"Is it already over......?"

Unaware of this, Masaki expressed amazement that the enemy's attacks had broken off, and this was not because he was a battlemonger.

"There's no way of telling if it's over for real. After all, we have no way of receiving intel."

Masaki's muttering to himself received a response from Kichijouji, who was approaching from behind.

In his immediate surroundings, there was no one else save for Kichijouji. There was no sign of his other companions, only blood soaked corpses piled ahead.

"So we need to take this opportunity to escape."

Kichijou said this in all seriousness as he watched Masaki put the handgun-shaped CAD that was glowing faintly red back into his chest pocket.

"We've already changed the tires. Masaki, let's get on board the bus."

Saying so, he turned around to see the students originally ready to meet the enemy had already congregated around the bus's location.

"Come on. The sooner we leave the better."

Kichijouji prodded Masaki.

Yet, Masaki shook his head.

"Masaki?"

"I'm going to head for the Magic Association branch office."

"That's too risky!"

His eyes widening, Kichijouji immediately expressed his disagreement to Masaki's words.

"First of all, for what!?"

Masaki wore an oddly detached expression as he replied back to his bestirred friend.

"To reinforce them. The Magicians from the Association couldn't possibly just be sitting there doing nothing. They must have formed a volunteer unit and joined in the defense."

"So what!"

"Because I am an 'Ichijou'."

These softly spoken words caused Kichijouji to suck in a breath.

"......Don't tell me, this is because of what happened earlier? No one meant anything by that. It's just that they weren't accustomed to it, they don't see Masaki as......"

"I wouldn't even bother with trivial things like that."

Masaki bulled over Kichijouji's words and shook his head.

"The first time I stepped onto the battlefield, I wanted to throw up too."

A wry smile appeared on Masaki's face as he added, "But I didn't."

Kichijouji felt that a distinct sense of loneliness emanating from that face.

"In addition, there's an absence of adequate supplies, trustworthy officers, and they were thrown into the field with no mental preparation whatsoever. The conditions were too terrible for a first battle."

"Exactly! That's why everyone expressed themselves that way."

"I already said that's not it."

Desperately trying to justify this — Masaki felt that this was "justifying" — Kichijouji was cut short by Masaki again.

"Although I cannot go into the specifics, the Ten Master Clans have a responsibility towards the Magic Association. As an Ichijou, and the eldest son to boot, I cannot scurry away and pretend this has nothing to do with me."

Masaki patted Kichijouji on the shoulder and advanced in the opposite direction of the bus.

"Then I'm going too!"

Catching Kichijouji's insistent scream, Masaki halted his footsteps.

"I am Masaki's tactician. If Masaki is joining the volunteers, then so am I."

"George, you need to help everyone escape safely."

Masaki merely turned his head slightly and spoke to Kichijouji with his face turned.

"This street is still a battlefield and there's no way of telling what will happen. Honestly, if I have to worry about whether the teachers and senpais got out of here safely, I cannot concentrate on the battle ahead."

After saying this, Masaki turned his face forward and continued onward with his back to Kichijouji.

"......Understood, Masaki. I will take up the responsibility to make sure everyone gets out safely. That's why, Masaki, you must return unharmed."

You are my only "commander". With this feeling in his heart, Kichijouji accepted Masaki's orders.

Hearing his words, Masaki kept his back to him and raised an arm in acknowledgement before once again stepping off towards the battlefield alone.

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"—They're here."

The first to discover the enemy's approach was Mikihiko.

The talismans spread out by the wind transmitted images of the enemy.

"Bipedal tanks...... They're different than before. They move like humans."

"Like humans?"

At Mikihiko's words, Erika tilted her head for some reason while wearing protective headphones. (In order to avoid interfering with the conversation, they weren't covering her ears.)

Bipedal tanks were created to access narrow paths with an upraised firing platform. At the same time, the stubby legs were equipped with treads to navigate steps and rubble, but it was never designed to function as a combat robot.

Among modern military technology, at least within Erika's knowledge, no combat robot that could mimic human motion existed.

"You can see it in a second...... There!"

But now was not the time to consider things removed from reality.

Accompanied by Mikihiko's voice, the bipedal tank appeared from behind the building.

The stubby legs with treads attached.

A slightly elongated body.

Until this point, all features were uniform with bipedal tanks.

However, the right arm was equipped with a chainsaw and the left hand had a pile driver with gunpowder, both of which were equipment that was impossible on a normal bipedal tank.

If the heavy machinery used to clear away obstacles in disaster zones was modified into human form, it would undoubtedly look like this.

In addition, there was a Howitzer mounted on the right shoulder and a heavy machine gun on the left shoulder.

"Combat robots!?"

As if in disbelief that her imagination had turned into reality, Erika's voice hitched.

By her side, Miyuki directed a chilling gaze at the nefarious looking mobile weapon.

Once the bipedal tank (?) entered her sight range, Miyuki unleashed her magic.

No questions were necessary. (Not that this was the phrase's original meaning)

All three machines halted their footsteps.

Their treads were frozen through, prompting them to come to a stop.

The fact that they didn't tip over demonstrated the superiority of their balancing modules.

But the legs were not the only things that were frozen.

Miyuki's magic was not child's play.

Anyone with the military knowledge to pilot a bipedal tank would immediately recognize the frost originated from a magical attack.

Needless to say, this long-haired young woman of chilling temperament barring their path was the source of the magic.

That being said, neither the machine gun nor the Howitzer spat fire.

This was not some simple Freezing Magic, she had also activated "Freeze Flame" — Miyuki's magic not only restricted movement but also prevented any increases in heat.

Seeing that the weapons were disabled, Leo immediately charged.

Calling this swift reaction time and nose for victory a manifestation of his wild nature would not be incorrect.

The weapon he held in his hands was similar to a short stick with a twin-headed hammer.

The entire length measured 50 cm, the grip alone was 30 cm.

The protruding head at the front end was much wider than the handle and was approximately 10 cm long. From the side, it looked almost like a Latin cross.

The head of the hammer started humming like a motor and a black membrane poked out from the head of the stick.

A very, very thin, transparent, black membrane.

The motor sound stopped and the membrane turned into a straight two meter long blade.

Completely flat, this was an ultra thin blade that could not be seen from the side.

This was the Chiba Family's secret sword "Usuba Kagerou".

Relying on Fortifying Magic to solidify the flatness, the thin blade was made up of carbon nanotubes.

Usuba Kagerou was both the name of the technique and also the name granted to this special weapon.

The Usuba Kagerou in Leo's right hand flickered.

The carbon nanotubes were woven into an ultra thin plate that was 5 nanometers thick, making it sharper than any sword or razor as it easily cut the frozen armor plating in half.

The front armor had been sliced diagonally.

All that remained was a thin bisection line that could barely be seen.

Red droplets slowly drizzled down from there.

Not only was this the result of highly intense training in a short period of time, this was also the might of the finishing strike custom made for Leo.

As if chasing the lithely retreating Leo, the bipedal tank collapsed by the roadside.

Although she was a step behind Leo out the door, in terms of who took out the prey first, Erika had the mastery.

She had adjusted her headset in a flash and used her left arm to hold the handle of Orochimaru steady as she fell into a stance.

The moment her hand transferred from the scabbard to the hilt, the scabbard split along the back of the blade like two pages of a book, revealing the gigantic blade within.

Her palm steady, Erika used her right pointer finger to press the button right below the edge.

Then, she hefted the entire 180 cm long blade on her shoulder.

At this point, the magic already activated.

The odachi that weighed ten kilograms flew through the air.

In that instant, Erika's silhouette vanished.

At least, she vanished from Miyuki's eyesight.

Immediately afterward, a shattering roar was heard.

It was similar to the sound from antique waste disposal facilities where metal was being crushed.

Erika maintained the swinging posture of the odachi.

The red fluid staining the blade was unquestionably the pilot's blood.

Gravity Systematic·Inertia Control Magic "Yamatsunami".

First, this minimized the inertia of the self and the weapon while closing in on the enemy at high speed. At the point of impact, the hidden sword technique amplified the transfer of inertia with the weapon's inertia and struck the target.

The overlapping false values of inertia could be further enhanced running from a farther distance to reach a maximum of 10 tons.

The speed received from the transfer of inertia coupled with the weight obtained from increased inertia.

At its maximum strength, Yamatsunami was like a giant, 10 ton guillotine crashing down from up high.

The armor that could resist such a blow probably didn't exist.

The key to this lay in when to switch from transfer of inertia to increased inertia.

In addition, necessary components also included the ability to sprint forward without losing one's balance due to loss of inertia and the ability to hold the blade steady and prevent wobbling.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the high speed reaction and perception that would not be subverted by the loss of inertia.

Those were the critical components to Yamatsunami.

Erika was born with that "speed" and, with countless days of harsh training, she finally obtained this ability.

Erika looked towards her next prey.

Leo was already closing on the next target.

Yamatsunami activated.

A second later, Leo disengaged Usuba Kagerou and covered his ears before the shattered bipedal tank.

The other half of the "guard" team — which was the "defense" team — also engaged the bipedal tanks in battle.

On this side, Isori planted walls that obstructed oscillations three meters into the earth so Kanon could freely use her magic that used the earth as a medium.

The "formation" that Isori spread underground was also able to detect the enemy on the surface.

The surface and insides were covered with diagrams, created with silk threads, that aided in magic invocation, which was essentially a magic formation.

As an elite of the Isori Family, who were the authorities on Engraving Magic, Isori Kei excelled in this sort of magic which was unimaginably similar to the ritual formations used in Mikihiko's Ancient Magic. In the end, no matter whether it was modern magic or Ancient Magic, they differed little on the point of "magic".

Hence both of them were fulfilling similar roles, which on some level made perfect sense.

"Incoming."

When Isori said this, Kanon spread out the Activation Sequence.

Although Isori had precautions in place, she couldn't use oscillation magic that was too strong when she was unfamiliar with the situation underground.

Two atypical bipedal tanks appeared.

Unfamiliar with the types of weaponry, Kanon wasn't really surprised by their odd shapes.

Without any additional considerations as a burden, she released the prearranged magic.

The paved road gave way to fine dust to form a swamp with the water that welled up from the slight oscillations in the earth.

The bipedal tanks sank down roughly a head's length because their feet sank into the earth.

Originally, treads were put in place to traverse sandy or wet terrain like open ground.

However, the liquefied road surface easily swallowed the smaller treads.

This was one of the variations of the Chiyoda Family's magic "Mine Genesis", "Oscillation Mine".

The result was as could be seen.

The magic liquefied the earth to prevent the enemy's advance.

The treads groaned as they churned the muddy water until the sand jammed the treads.

At some point, the moisture was evaporated, causing the liquefied road surface with the bipedal tank's legs still stuck inside to solidify.

After liquefying the earth, Kanon used moisture oscillation to cause them to evaporate.

The magic known as Oscillation Mine referred to a chain of processes that ultimately led to capture.

Although objects from the previous century differed somewhat, paving materials were still basically composed of concrete. Even so, it's not like she caused a complete liquefied reaction. Rather, she just altered the state of sand that was immersed in water. Despite calling this a capture, in reality this was only a temporary measure, but given that the enemy was currently unable to move, this temporary measure was sufficient to deliver a fatal blow.

Standing to the flanks of the immobile bipedal tanks, Toshikazu and Kirihara appeared.

Toshikazu attacked from the skies.

There was no way the pilot of the bipedal tank could react to that sort of speed in time.

Like a hawk descending from the heavens, he smoothly cut a deep slash across the pilot's seat.

Secret Sword "Tetsuzan".

Usually, the "blade" was the only concept set inside the blade with a Magic Sequence from Move-Systematic magic set to guide the blade's slashing motion. —If the weapon wasn't "Ikazuchimaru".

When Ikazuchimaru was used to activate "Tetsuzan", not only the blade, but swordsman was also included within the magic's targets.

At the same time that the blade was set as a concept, the "swordsman wielding the blade" was set as another complementary concept, thus realizing the possibility of high speed attacks and slashes without trembling.

When he swung the sword downwards, his body already knew how to move. Through thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of repetitive motions and practice, the slashing action had already been carved into his very body by the time he learned this technique.

The general consensus was that the eldest son of the Chiba Family was not as talented as his younger brother.

In reality, Toshikazu himself believed that Naotsugu was a prodigy and he was not.

Precisely because he wasn't a genius, he relied on a determined training regime unknown to other people to earn the ability to use Ikazuchimaru's Tetsuzan technique, "Lightning Tetsuzan".

Because this was a technique taken to the logical extreme, once he initiated "Lightning Tetsuzan", he could only follow through with the motion. This is why he made sure no one saw him practice.

For this reason, many people mistakenly believed that he was a slothful individual while he actually earned this secret sword through his incredible diligence.

The bipedal tank whose pilot's seat was cut in two finally went silent.

The other bipedal tank turned its other body to meet Kirihara, who was closing in while pressed low to the ground.

He was still a step away from entering close quarters combat.

The muzzle of the machine gun pointed at Kirihara, but no bullets spat out.

Behind Kirihara, a kodachi came flying to impact on the machine gun and knock it off the bipedal tank's shoulder.

Diagonally behind Kirihara, Sayaka readied another kodachi and threw it.

The Howitzer was also taken out.

The two kodachis returned along their flight axis back into Sayaka's hands.

Knife throwing.

Although Sayaka belonged to the Kendo Club in school, her father was a Magician who used kenjutsu in live combat. She learned kenjutsu techniques and rudimentary lessons from home. Among those lessons, her area of expertise lay in knife throwing.

In a head on confrontation, a woman could not avoid being on the weaker end when it came to wrist strength. For example, the Sonic Blade favored by Kirihara relied heavily on wrist strength. It was too difficult for her to control the tachi using magic with her magic technical ability. Yet when it came to knife throwing, that had nothing to do with wrist strength so long as she could match her magic with the throwing motion. With this in mind, she trained relentlessly to be able to use this magic.

Since there was a huge opening after the initial throwing motion, this was not something she dared to use against swift opponents but would be perfect against this sort of large, plodding opponent.

Seeing that the firearms had been taken out, Kirihara took the last step forward.

A giant saw was being brought down on his head.

However, he had already seen through its trajectory.

His body naturally began to slide and Kirihara's blade bisected the bipedal tank's left leg.

Sonic Blade.

His favorite magic easily sheared through the armor plating designed to withstand land mines and anti-armor rifle rounds.

The tank body came crashing down.

Kirihara cut off the pile driver at the base as he fell back and then looped around the side to plunge the blade into the pilot's seat.

The feeling that traveled across his hand told him he penetrated flesh.

Kirihara's face twisted slightly as he pulled the blade out and leaped far away from the bipedal tank.

The expression on his face was most definitely not a smile.

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After searching the APC's wreckage, Tatsuya removed a 30 cm long box from the vehicle.

"Is this it?"

He held the box in front of the camera as he asked this question.

"Yes, that's it. Put it in front of the analyzer...... Yep, looks like it."

A reply came back across the display on the camera.

"That's the Magic Booster."

"It looks like a normal box."

"Connection and operation are completely done through a ritual feedback loop, so there's no mechanical outlet."

On the other side of the display, Sanada continued explaining to Tatsuya, who was frowning with suspicion at the flat box that only had a handle.

"You said that the APC's anti-physical magic barrier was being amplified by this booster, right?"

"That should be the case. Although it's only speculation on our side, but it fits."

Sanada expressed his agreement towards Yanagi's speculation on the matter.

"Then our enemy's identity becomes obvious. Well, not that there were any other possible culprits anyways."

"Although this is insufficient as evidence, we are neither the police nor judges. Though even if we did know their identity, our plan of action probably wouldn't change."

On the other side of the display, both of the captains broke into evil smiles.

He really didn't want to turn into those people, Tatsuya thought with a little hesitation before verifying his next set of orders.

"Then, are we to sink the Great Asian Alliance's camouflaged combat vessel?"

"Sinking it in the confines of the harbor is a bad idea. We would impact the harbor's functions too heavily."

Of course, he was aware of that possibility. He was only joking when he mentioned sinking the vessel, but that appeared to have provoked an answer that was more serious than he anticipated, hence Tatsuya was slightly apologetic.

"Then are we conducting a boarding action?"

Yanagi asked Kazama, who replaced Sanada on the monitor.

Somehow, he got the feeling that boarding the enemy vessel with such a tiny force had already turned into a predetermined event, Tatsuya thought.

It was only now that he remembered that these acquaintances of his — his current superiors — did not know the meaning of a joke, or maybe they were the type of people who had become accustomed to accomplishing things that most people would assume was a joke.

"We'll put that off until the end. There are public figures in the plaza before the bus station who have called in helicopters for evacuating civilians. After handing the area over to the unit from Tsurumi, head to the bus station and provide cover for the evacuation."

"Understood."

Standing next to Yanagi, Tatsuya saluted at the same time and thought what a courageous bunch of public figures those people were.

Even if they were evacuating, remembering to take civilians who had not evacuated yet was certainly a praiseworthy gesture, he thought.

"Also, the public figures who called in the helicopters are called Saegusa Mayumi and Kitayama Shizuku. If the two of them have any requests on site, please do your best to accommodate them."

Hearing these familiar names in his ear, Tatsuya barely suppressed a coughing fit.

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Almost at the same time, the other locations also ascertained their enemy's identity.

Although the wreckage that Erika smashed was a dead loss, Miyuki, Erika, Leo, and Mikihiko were crowded in front of the other bipedal tank that was undamaged save for the pilot seat that Leo slashed open. Mikihiko was the one who called the other three over.

"In regards to this bipedal tank, I don't think it's moving just through machinery."

"In other words, they applied other sorts of spells?"

"Exactly."

It wasn't anything special for Miyuki to use a more formal tone with boys (this was not always the case, as she might adopt a different tone in different circumstances).

Maybe for the same reason, Mikihiko was never able to speak casually around Miyuki (he was always like this).

"The limb motions for these three were amazingly human-like. The bipedal tank's body is dominated by the pilot's seat and has too many structural differences compared to the human body. They couldn't imitate human motions even if they wanted to because doing so should lead to loss of mobility."

"Even so, these guys still manifested 'overly' life-like motions, right?"

Mikihiko nodded without hesitation at Leo's question.

"Their mobility is not just coming from pistons, gears, or electricity. I believe that there's also some force at work here to enable the limbs to mimic human motion."

"In other words, they're using magic? What kind of magic?"

"Probably Senshi Shihei Jutsu."

"Senshi Shihei Jutsu?"

Erika turned the unfamiliar name over in her mouth as she tilted her head.

"Is that the humanoid servant magic from the Onmyo System? I heard it originally came from the Daoists."

Hearing Miyuki's answer, Mikihiko couldn't help but nod in admiration.

"Indeed. Senshi Shihei Jutsu involves cutting paper into human shapes, then sprinkling magic on it to turn them into soldiers."

The latter half of that explanation was for Erika.

"In other words, our enemy comes from the Great Asian Alliance?"

Yet Erika flung the magic's explanation to the back of her head and directly announced the enemy's identity.

"Aren't we jumping to conclusions here? Magic from the Onmyo System may also hint at traitors from within."

"No, I think there's an 80 to 90% chance that Erika is on the right track."

Although Leo expressed his question with a caution that seemed entirely unlike him, Mikihiko still shook his head and expressed his support for Erika's opinion.

"This may sound strange, but Ancient Magic was also mainstream at one point...... Among those who emphasize tradition, there are skills that enjoyed considerable popularity over the years, and also skills that have become outdated. In the past 10 years, you cannot find shikigami with actual physical bodies no matter which branch of Ancient Magic you look into within the country. In our country, Senshi Shihei Jutsu has already been abandoned as magic. In order to grant bipedal tanks the full range of motion to use saws and pile drivers, the more magic that is present the better. If it was me, I would enchant the pile driver and saw themselves. Even we Ancient Magic users are not so stubborn as to insist on using abandoned magic despite knowing that there is wasteful excess within the magic."

"I'm not talking about who's more stubborn and all that."

Seeing Mikihiko starting to overthink this — or at least become overly conscious, Leo's expression turned a tad stiff as he waved his hands.

"In summation, the ones controlling the bipedal tanks are Magicians from the Great Asian Alliance? OK, got it."

"Ah, no, well...... I guess that's how it is."

Mikihiko likely realized that he was projecting his anger within his words and sheepishly shut his mouth. Still, his expression altered swiftly as he dropped another bombshell to the other three.

"Eh? You want Shibata-san to go over there?"

After receiving the request over the loudspeakers on the transmission terminal, Mayumi involuntarily shouted back.

"......OK. Well, I guess you have a point...... Fine, I understand. But let's make sure we get her opinion on the matter first...... Yes, I think putting it to her directly would better. Shibata-san."

Mayumi removed the terminal from her ear and passed it to Mizuki.

"Yes, what is it......?"

"Miyuki-chan's group would like Shibata-san to head over. They have provided an in-depth explanation, so please listen carefully before making a decision."

Normally, Mayumi and Mizuki did not meet very frequently. Thus, when receiving the transmission terminal that was accompanied by something close to a mission briefing, Mizuki could only helplessly and carefully, no, more like fearfully receive the terminal.

"Ah, Shibata-san?"

"Yoshida-kun?"

Now that she knew it was Mikihiko on the other hand, Mizuki's expression relaxed a few degrees.

If Erika was on the other line, there was no telling when she would say something outrageous whereas Mizuki would still grow anxious when speaking to Miyuki for no apparent reason.

Still, why was she relaxed around Mikihiko — Mizuki had not discovered the meaning for this for herself yet.

"I would like to borrow Shibata-san's power."

On the other side, Mikihiko's tone was a little anxious. —Actually, he seemed rather excited.

"Eh, power?"

"The enemy is using Ancient Magic called Senshi Shihei Jutsu to command their mobile armors. Since their magic differs in nature with my own, I'm having a hard time grasping the enemy's magic. However, with Shibata-san's 'eyes', I think that you can read the enemy's movements faster and locate the core of the enemy's magic faster than I can. Once you locate the core, I can use my magic to nullify the enemy's Senshi Shihei Jutsu. That's why I hope that Shibata-san can get over here as soon as you can. Of course, this will be dangerous, but I will definitely protect you."

"—!"

Speechless, Mizuki turned completely red.

She understood very clear that there was no ulterior meaning in that.

But—

"See, Mizuki. Yoshida-kun will definitely protect you, right?"

"—!"

"—!"

Once Miyuki's voice came across the terminal, an aura of silence seemed to have been passed across as well. Both of their brains were flooded with images of the other person's face and, in an awkward silence that gave them fits, time seemed to stop.

"......Of course, not just Yoshida-kun, but the rest of us will protect you to the best of our ability."

The frozen time was restored when Miyuki broke the silence.

Overhearing the transmission, Mayumi could not help but remark privately, "Miyuki-chan really is an S......"

"Y-Yes! We will all defend you!"

Mizuki softly nodded at Mikihiko's hysterical cry that seemed to speak on so many levels.

"I understand. I'm heading over right now."

Removing the terminal from her ear, Mizuki let out a huge sigh and handed the terminal back to Mayumi. After that, she lightly bowed to Mayumi before jogging off to the "front line" where Mikihiko and company were stationed.

Chapter 12

By 4:30 PM local time, the battle was starting to turn around.

Originally, the invading army never planned to get bogged down for a long fight.

There was only one invading vessel in the shape of a camouflaged cargo ship; they were not working very closely with the soldiers who infiltrated ahead of time. The initial objective of the surprise attack was the National High School Magic Thesis Competition, but due to the fact that insufficient forces were committed, only partial damage was caused to the building. Even so, they originally anticipated only police resistance as they took control of key objectives and kidnapped civilians, hence they only invested a small force. However, a major miscalculation came from the fact that the Magic Association organized volunteers for defense much faster than they expected.

Of course, there was also the fast reaction time from the JSDF. One hour after mobilization, a battalion of reinforcements had appeared to shield the fleeing civilians.

Since the nearby enemy started retreating, the battle turned into a peace-keeping sweep. Beyond verifying the identities of evacuating civilians, the situation was improving rapidly.

However, the young men and women stuck in the heart of the maelstrom had no inkling of this.

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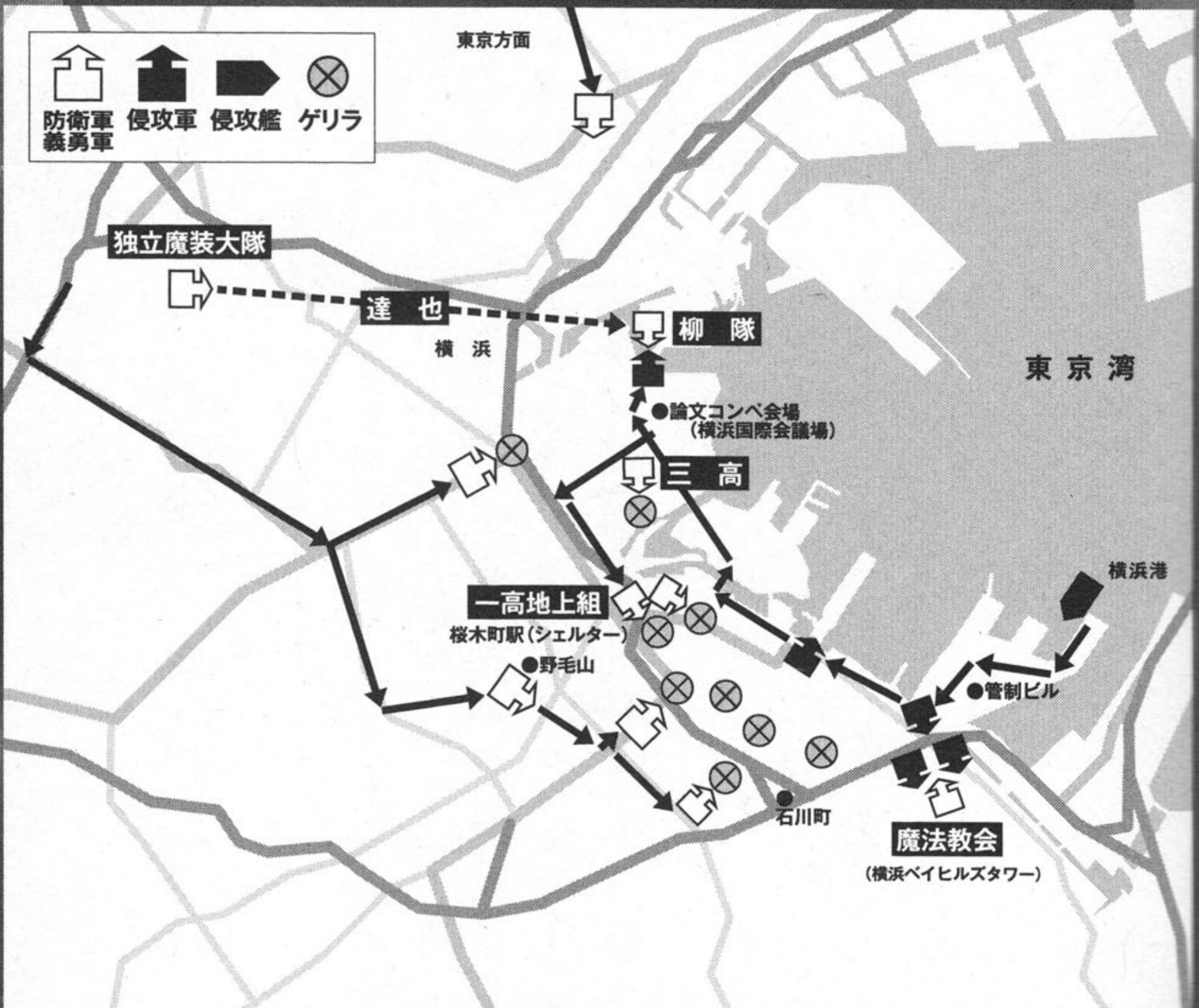
横浜事変
概略図
3


防衛軍
義勇軍
侵攻軍
侵攻艦
ゲリラ
東京方面
独立魔装大隊
達　也
横　浜
柳　隊
東　京　湾
●論文コンペ会場
（横浜国際会議場）
三　高
横浜港
一高地上組
桜木町駅（シェルター）
●野毛山
●管制ビル
石川町
魔法教会
（横浜ベイヒルズタワー）
横須賀方面

西暦2095年10月30日
午後4時30分 現在

"Kurosawa-san? ...Yes, OK. ...Yes, thank you."

After speaking with someone, who must have been the butler from her home (Kitayama Family), Shizuku removed the transmission device from her ear. Simultaneously, the sound of a helicopter's engine could be heard.

"Saegusa-senpai, the company's helicopters will be here shortly."

Hearing Shizuku's report, Mayumi raised her face from the messaging terminal she was staring at with a grim expression and put on a cool smile.

"I got it. Kitayama-san, you go ahead and take the women and families with children first. Inagaki-san, please accompany her and provide support for Kitayama-san on board. Also, Inagaki-san, could you please coordinate and direct the people who haven't evacuated yet? Ichihara and I will also lend a hand. Mitsui-san, please monitor the surroundings."

Crisply giving out a series of orders, she quietly heaved a small sigh. The already fussy civilians who were being evacuated slowly would undoubtedly be displeased.

There were a lot of people who balked at having a child controlling the evacuation process.

So far, they hadn't encountered anyone creating a scene because they were afraid that they couldn't board the helicopter in time, but if there were any delays from the incoming helicopters, then tensions and anxiety would definitely rise.

Originally, two helicopters arriving at the same time would have been ideal, but she couldn't tell the helicopter that arrived first to just wait overhead.

"What are you doing wasting time here? Seriously."

Looks like Mayumi first needed to wrestle down her own anxiety.

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The CO of the invasion force didn't bother to hide his grim visage at the continuously worsening situation of the battle. In order to succeed, this operation called for a solo ship to blitzkrieg the enemy nation, accomplish all the objectives, and evacuate before the enemy could respond. According to this design, the first phase of the mission was a complete success. While the enemy's fast response time was within predictable parameters, the strength of the civilian resistance surpassed all prediction. Based on the original plan, they should already have shifted to the withdrawal phase, but while they were bogged down with the resistance from the volunteers, the enemy's encirclement was complete.

The route along the coastline to the north had been barred by forces coming from Tsurumi. It was now impossible to catch up to the civilians fleeing by sea and take hostages.

"Lost contact with all unmanned observation drones!"

Upon his subordinate's report, the CO couldn't help but bitterly smack his lips. Even the last unmanned drone had been shot down. Now, he could only issue orders with the intel he had on hand. He mentally railed at Chen Xiangshan, who was currently deep in the enemy formation and still had yet to send the signal, before ordering the troops headed north to retreat.

At the same time, in the inland direction — there was a plaza in front of the bus station waiting for helicopters to arrive.

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The wheeled APC that turned the corner on the intersection skidded and started spinning.

Isori's "Road Extension" successfully broke through the vehicle's suspension and caused the APC to flip over, only coming to a stop after the spinning wheels collided with a traffic light.

"Kanon!"

"Leave it to me!"

Since they were on the outer perimeter of the defense line, Kanon no longer had to worry about the students in the underground shelter, so she could activate the Chiyoda Family's far-famed "Mine Genesis" with impunity.

A titanic vibration originated from beneath the APC as if mocking the shock resistant devices attached to each wheel. The shock wave spread throughout the vehicle's interior and caused untold damage. The outer armor of the APC survived, but the insides were a complete mess. Thanks to the shock delivered to the brain and semicircular canals, the pilot must have been concussed into unconsciousness.

Bullets from an autocannon turret tore chunks out of the building's wall that the two of them were hiding behind. That was retaliatory fire from the APCs following the lead vehicle.

Isori hugged the screaming Kanon into his chest and protected her with his body while he erected a reverse momentum field along the wall.

Taking advantage of the opening created by the reflected bullets impacting the APC, Mari activated magic that lowered oxygen density from her hiding spot on the other side.

However, to defend against BC[1] weapons, the excellent air filtration system within the vehicles resisted the change, so her magic didn't achieve any noticeable effect.

Clucking her tongue, Mari disengaged the magic that interfered with the oxygen density's Eidos and instead increased the temperature of the air surrounding the Howitzer.

The Howitzer was just about to fire, and the ensuing explosion took out the neighboring autocannon turret as well.

Seeing that the APC had lost all combat capabilities, Kirihara charged forward on the attack.

The armor was penetrated easily.

Sonic Blade stabbed into the pilot's seat.

The rear cargo doors opened and soldiers armed with rifles appeared.

A bolt came flying.

Immediately afterward, Kirihara's sword sliced through the throat of the soldier whose right arm was pierced by that bolt.

"Mibu, you alright?"

Sayaka was the one who shot the right shoulder of the soldier taking aim at Kirihara. Sayaka insisted that "she is coming along no matter what" (that alone was sufficient to hesitate Kirihara), to which Kirihara presented the condition that "she is not to use her sword techniques to kill anyone". The only times she was allowed to use the sword was against nonhuman targets or in cases where she was forced to defend herself against other humans; all other situations were strictly forbidden. For this, besides her kodachis, Sayaka was also equipped with a small mechanical crossbow device.

"I'm fine. This is the battlefield, and I've already made up my mind."

Sayaka's face was a little pale, but her answer was resolute.

At this moment, the ground started to shake again.

This time, it was the incoming bipedal tanks that suffered under Kanon's magic.

Unfortunately, the enemy vehicles retreated to reduce taking damage.

Wary of further attacks from the Howitzers, they were forced to take cover.

The slowly growing enemy formation locked their sights on Kanon's group.

Miyuki's interference strength did not allow any enemy magic to exist.

Even those amplified by Boosters.

The frozen APC was under attack from "Usuba Kagerou".

The length of the ultra thin blade made of carbon nanotubes tucked within the hammer head could increase up to 20 meters. In other words, Leo was holding a sword that could stretch out to 20 meters at will.

Still, the longer the blade length was, the greater the difficulty of the Fortifying Magic to sustain it. That being said, Leo easily formed a 10 meter long blade and neatly bisected the APC from the side.

"Enemies on the right flank! Core is in the same position!"

Mizuki was the first to catch wind of the enemy bipedal tank rounding their flank while Mikihiko provided the magic to break the enchantment.

As if the bipedal tank ran straight into an invisible wall, both arms draped downwards.

There, Erika struck with a speed that the eye could not follow.

Yamatsunami.

Orochimaru's large blade smashed the mechanized weaponry that was twice its height.

Miyuki and Mikihiko provided covering fire, which allowed Leo and Erika to take down the enemy vehicles one by one.

"Mizuki."

After things settled down for a while, Mizuki turned her head when someone unexpectedly called her name, only to find Miyuki inquiring about what the other groups were doing.

"How is Chiyoda-senpai's side doing?"

Miyuki did not know about the reinforcements headed in Mari's direction, nor did Mizuki mention this. (She never had the leisure to do so.)

"Hm... There's still no change. They're still locked in combat."

The team of upperclassmen took up a defensive position slightly ahead of them. It was the second of two important positions leading to the bus station.

"What is it, Miyuki? Why are you thinking about that at this point in time?"

Seeing Miyuki frown slightly as she spoke to Mizuki, Erika asked with Orochimaru hanging over her shoulder.

"Don't you think this is a little strange? Why is the enemy specifically coming for our area?"

Erika also furrowed her brows at Miyuki's question.

"If they want to get to the bus station, don't they have to pass through our location?"

The two locations where the upperclassmen and Year 1 student teams were dug in were based off of Suzune's estimations using the local map.

However, Miyuki was unable to accept Mizuki's response at face value.

"That would be under the assumption that the enemy advanced along open streets, Mizuki. The enemy is at least equipped with communication devices.

We only have a paltry 10 people on defense; the enemy could easily circumvent us by secretly advancing through areas we have no one defending."

"...They must be blocked off."

Erika's words prompted a look on Mizuki's face that said "I have no idea what you're talking about."

"Incoming!"

Yet, with Mikihiko's warning that new enemies were inbound, their speculation was forcibly put on hold.

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Once the twin-engine helicopter piloted by Kurosawa — this female butler seemed to know how to pilot helicopters in addition to taking the wheel of a vessel — appeared overhead and prepared to lower the altitude, an incident broke out.

Suddenly, a black cloud appeared and rolled through the air. Without warning, a swarm of locusts came barreling down out of season.

Even if they were only locusts, flying into the active intake was extremely dangerous.

Also, this unnatural timing hinted at their supernatural origins.

About to greet the helicopter, Shizuku immediately made the decision to pull out her CAD.

A handgun-shaped silver CAD.

After the Nine Schools Competition, she purchased the second generation Silver Series.

On it, she had installed "Phonon Mazer" under the Loopcast System.

Pointing it at the sky, she pulled the trigger repeatedly.

Rays of sound cut swathes through the locusts.

"There's, too many...!"

The locust swarm wasn't being burned to death, merely disappeared upon being burned, but that was only a portion of the entire swarm.

Despite the repeated Phonon Mazers striking the rapidly approaching locusts, the swarm continued to close in on the descending helicopter.

Honoka noticed this as well, but since her magic was unsuitable for meeting the enemy, she held back in fear that her magic would interfere with Shizuku's own.

Just as the locust swarm was about to engulf the helicopter.

A hurricane of annihilation swept across the swarm.

Like a dream, the black cloud of locusts lost cohesion and swiftly vanished as their colors died away.

Honoka and Shizuku both looked skyward.

Half a step late in detecting the anomaly, Mayumi and Suzune also swept their gazes skyward.

There, a black figure hovered in the air with a silver CAD in hand.

"Tatsuya...?"

There was no way to tell if Shizuku or Honoka said this.

More combat personnel wearing the same black suits appeared and formed a protective barrier around the helicopter.

The cargo helicopter began to descend once more.

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"Successfully denied enemy chemical congregation attack; commence escort for helicopter landing."

"Leave the escort to other personnel. Special Lieutenant, hunt down the Magician and eradicate them."

"Understood."

Acknowledging Yanagi's order, Tatsuya activated the "eye" used to locate the Magicians who sent the familiars.

When he struck, he wasn't aiming to decompose each individual locust's body.

The target his magic was aimed at was the Magic Sequences that formed each locust's chemical congregation.

After decomposing the magic holding the chemical congregation together, the locust dissolved back into psions.

During this process, he also caught the trail where the Magic Sequence was coming from.

At this distance and taking into account the time already spent, even while continuing to maintain Flying-Type Magic, finishing the S&D[2] mission was a piece of cake.

(There, is it?)

Although he could take them out from here, using magic within sight range was significantly easier.

Tatsuya flew towards the skies above the fleeing Magician.

◇ ◇ ◇

Wielding large caliber silver guns — gun-shaped CADs — the soldiers in black garb flew like comets towards the skyscrapers.

Comrades toting rifles formed a circle in the sky as the helicopter descended to the plaza in the middle.

The pitch black figures with completely obscured figures gave the impression that they were the harbingers of disaster.

However, regardless of whether it was Honoka or Shizuku, Mayumi or Suzune, none of them felt uneasy in any way.

"Who are they?"

Inagaki walked over and asked warily.

"Comrades."

Mayumi replied succinctly with a smile.

They could be said to be Tatsuya's comrades, Fujibayashi's comrades, or a unit from the JSDF.

Mayumi wasn't familiar with the details, but that was sufficient.

While the civilians were boarding the helicopter, they carefully guarded the area from up high.

They had been continuously in flight for ten minutes at least.

Even so, there was no sign of magic exhaustion.

All of them must be high class Magicians.

There was once such a rumor.

The JSDF selected powerful Magicians from specialized fields and formed an experimental unit.

Their individual rankings as Magicians were nothing special, but once in combat, they were a combat Magician unit capable of unimaginable carnage.

Thinking along those lines, they fit the criteria perfectly.

"They're reliable reinforcements!"

Mayumi added this as she watched the helicopter load up on civilians.

The helicopter with Shizuku and Inagaki on board successfully lifted off and once it reached a height safe from hostile fire, the flying units from the Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion on guard scattered towards the surrounding skyscrapers.

The remaining citizens were considerably settled now. The JSDF was on guard, and although there was that sense of foreboding because their faces couldn't be seen, at the very least it was better than leaving everything to children. As for their current feeling, there was little point in demanding anything further from them.

"They're finally here..."

There was no longer any danger of a panic settling in thanks to the reinforcements, but Mayumi yearned to escape from the pressure exerted by the citizens, so there was nothing fake about using the word "finally" to describe her current mood when the long sought for sound of engines came to her ears.

A military twin-engine helicopter had arrived.

It was a whole level larger than the normal helicopter Shizuku arranged for.

This way, the remaining civilians could all be brought on board with no difficulty.

Also, the helicopter didn't arrive alone.

There was another combat helicopter escorting the first one.

"Mayumi Ojou-sama, are you safe?"

Her bodyguard Nakura's voice came across the transmission device tucked in her ear.

"I'm fine, Nakura. Where are you?"

"I'm aboard the combat helicopter. The master ordered Ojou-sama to also board this helicopter."

"—I understand."

Mayumi already gave up on asking to "stay behind". Unfortunately, Nakura was better at close quarters combat too. Even so, she couldn't just attack the helicopter that came to rescue them, hence she had abandoned all ideas of resistance.

"Anyway, please hasten the boarding process."

After ending the transmission, she made the request to Suzune.

In response, Suzune turned her head.

At this time.

"Don't move!"

A young man put an arm around Suzune's neck from behind while a glimmering knife appeared in the other hand.

Although the rifles on the neighboring skyscraper pointed in the man's direction, another man rushed in front of him holding a grenade.

"...I see, so this was the plan all along?"

The one who quietly spoke up was the one being threatened by the knife, Suzune.

"You certainly think quickly on your feet!"

Although that steadiness warned him something was awry, the guerrilla who pretended to be one of the fleeing civilians still replied in the affirmative to Suzune's words.

"The mechanized units drew our forward firepower so you could ascertain the target once the number of fleeing people decreased."

"We never planned on letting them flee in the first place, but even if they did, that wouldn't impact the mission in the slightest."

Suzune spoke as if completely ignorant of the danger, whereas the man also seemed to be affected by this and replied back.

"You selected me as the target because of a reliable source of energy?"

"Not just that. Several of ours were captured in this battle, and you are the hostage necessary for their release."

"I'm not that big of a bargaining chip."

"I'm not so sure about that—I thought I said don't move!"

Keenly aware that Mayumi was operating her CAD from behind her back, the man waved the knife in his hand.

Mayumi gave up and put both hands up.

"If you're the hostage, there's no way the Saegusa Family would just abandon you. Compared to taking their daughter as the hostage, taking the daughter's friend as a hostage is far more effective."

"That's true, since Mayumi is a naive person."

Why was she watching me with such critical eyes; despite how unreasonable those words were, Mayumi couldn't interfere.

Maybe she was being "naive", but certainly not to the degree that deserved a scolding.

"Next, you're going to abduct me to your home country, correct?"

"Exactly."

"But shouldn't you perform the exchange beforehand?"

"That's... You! What have you done?"

The man finally realized he said far too much. While he did have a hostage in hand, even he couldn't believe that he just shot his mouth for so long while surrounded by enemies.

"Your combat capability isn't too bad."

Suzune easily pushed aside the hand holding the knife.

"But your target selection is poor."

She deftly got free of the arm around her neck.

"I'm nothing special when casting magic with a CAD, but my magic without a medium surpasses even Mayumi and Juumonji-kun."

She turned to the man holding the grenade and plucked the grenade from his hand.

"I can numb your muscles and nervous system at will. For a time, your bodies cannot move freely."

As she said, no matter how they tried to budge a muscle, their hands and feet were unable to consciously move.

"Magic that directly interfered with the human body was once forbidden. The very nature of this magic was essentially a form of human experimentation, hence it was forbidden on the surface. The disadvantage is that this requires a certain amount of time to activate, but your ceaseless tirade certainly proved to be a huge help. Oh yes, speaking of which, your verbosity had nothing to do with magic. You were simply too careless."

Suzune said this with a chilling smirk on her face.

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The enemy attacks on the side branch of the Magic Association intensified. Reaching the limit of their attack, the invader force committed their forces to get a decisive victory.

In the side branch, Katsuto kept overhearing reports coming in.

The JSDF were beginning their counterattack from Sakuragi-chō, but the volunteers formed by the Magic Association were barely holding the enemy at China Street in Ishikawamachi.

"—Have you prepared a combat uniform?"

At Katsuto's question, the female employee looked aghast.

"Do you mean to sortie yourself? You can't do that!"

"You have prepared a combat uniform, correct?"

Still, Katsuto's determined follow up question overawed the female employee into nodding.

"But, you're the heir of the Juumonji Family..."

"Please lead the way."

Katsuto cut short her stuttering words.

The female attendant stiffly rose to her feet.

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The other scion of the Ten Master Clans joined the volunteers at China Street. Amid the enemies running to and fro, one man passed through them accompanied by blossoming crimson flowers and made contact with the unit fighting against the invasion force.

The protective gear he wore was obtained from one of the wounded.

Pressed against cover, his left hand tightly gripped the glowing red CAD as Masaki panted loudly.

This was the exhaustion caused by repeated use of Rupture.

In addition, the enemy's attacks switched from mobile armors to magic, causing exhaustion to set in earlier.

Phantoms advanced in waves. They were called phantoms because they didn't have an actual body and were illusions created by Ancient Magic.

Masaki didn't use the Specialized CAD in his left hand and operated the Generalized CAD on his left wrist.

Interference strength expanded outwards.

With only a wooden idol left behind, the phantom illusions vanished.

In order to create a wide area interference strength and dispel all the phantoms, this exhausted a lot of Masaki's reserves.

His "Rupture" magic was used to evaporate fluids within the target's body. If the target did not contain fluids inside its body, then that magic would have no effect.

The enemy's response was incredibly swift. Seeing the first force of bipedal tanks fall under attacks from Rupture, they immediately threw phantom units onto the battlefield.

Against illusions created by Ancient Magic with no physical body, Rupture held no meaning.

Even without a physical body, the illusions still possessed attack power.

They worked in the same way as hypnosis.

Humans cut by the illusions would die from the red welt that appeared on their body.

While Magicians who applied Data Fortification to themselves could nullify the phantom strikes, volunteers who were not Magicians were not so fortunate.

Mixed in with the volunteers, Masaki could only continue to clash against the phantoms while his specialized magic was sealed, all the while desperately searching for the location of the enemy Magicians.

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On the side of the cargo helicopters, the civilian boarding was already complete.

"Rin-chan, it's all up to you now."

"Mayumi, don't push yourself too hard."

The helicopter took off.

The soldiers in black accompanied the helicopter into the air and flew escort.

After seeing the helicopter ascend to a safe height, the flying soldiers flew towards the coast.

"Let's go as well. Let's find Miyuki and Mari's groups and get out of here."

"—Got it."

Nakura seemed to have something to say upon hearing Mayumi's orders, but ultimately chose to respectfully bow his head and return to the co-pilot's seat.

The combat helicopter Mayumi and Honoka boarded began to ascend.

Along the way, Mayumi noticed one of the soldiers watching them leave from atop one of the skyscrapers.

In his right hand, he held a silver Specialized CAD.

Honoka was facing the other direction, so she didn't see him.

On the helicopter, Mayumi stuck her tongue out at that soldier.

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Beneath his gray mask, Tatsuya clearly beheld Mayumi making a funny face at him.

(...What a cheerful individual.)

Beyond that, Tatsuya had no other thoughts on the subject.

(Speaking of which, so Ichihara-senpai used to be "Ichihana", eh.)

The magic that Suzune used was the other reason why the Ichihana name had been stripped.

That magic relied a great deal on the Ichihana Family's natural innate qualities.

Magic that directly interfered with the human body was forbidden at the time, so besides medical reasons, usage of that sort of magic was heavily restricted.

Although he had no idea whether Suzune was aware of all the details, the truth of the matter was that she inherited the Ichihana bloodline.

However, Tatsuya also thought.

(If that's the case, then my magic wouldn't result in something so easy as being stripped of my number.)

Instead of chuckling wryly, he was silently contemplating this in the privacy of his mind. Tatsuya activated the transmission device on his helmet.

"Saegusa Mayumi-san has boarded the helicopter and is flying towards the coast at low altitude. She is expected to rendezvous with her peers and underclassmen before evacuating from the area."

"Understood. After verifying that the VIP has departed from the combat zone, return to the main unit."

"Understood."

So it's finally starting, Tatsuya thought, after he cut the feed.

Yanagi may not have said it, but the counterattack was about to begin even if he did not.

Thus, the first priority was to ensure that Mayumi's group safely escaped.

Standing on the roof, Tatsuya pointed his CAD downwards and simply pulled the trigger.

One corner of the building burst into flames before abruptly disappearing.

Besides the guided missile launcher that fell to the ground, nothing else remained.

Modern day weapons would not detonate because of such a trivial impact.

The same occurrence happened five times.

After double-checking that there was nobody else taking aim at the helicopter, Tatsuya turned his head.

Only to find a man holding a sword standing there.

"—Who are you?"

The question came from the man before him.

To be able to climb up here — and not using any orthodox method at that since he took the odd approach of leaping between the walls of skyscrapers. He was definitely a man of considerable skill.

"JSDF 101 Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion Special Lieutenant, Ooguro Ryuuya."

"What?"

The man — Inspector Chiba Toshikazu, didn't expect Tatsuya to frankly answer his question.

Tatsuya's sudden reply along with that unheard of unit designation caused Toshikazu's stance to waver slightly.

Tatsuya lightly stepped off the rooftop.

Rather than jumping in Toshikazu's direction, he flew off the building.

Tatsuya's left hand tapped his belt.

His body was released from gravity's control.

The CAD in his right hand keeping Toshikazu at bay, Tatsuya soared to a height where bullets could not reach.

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The volunteers from the Magic Association were forced to retreat step by step.

The enemy's amphibious unit was plainly their main force.

The unit advancing to the north was a mixed unit of APCs and bipedal tanks though the primary force composed of APCs, but the enemy force assaulting the Magic Association branch was composed of special bipedal tanks designed for close combat along with multiple Magicians alongside.

Wild beasts that looked like dogs turned into fiery bombs. They were chemical congregations created by Ancient Magic to mimic the monster called the "Wazawaito".

Just when they thought that was all there was, a one legged crane-like bird dispersed flaming ash and vanished. They were chemical congregations also formed by Ancient Magic that imitated the form of monsters called the "Hitzukata".

Ancient Magic from the mainland swarmed the volunteers.

The enemy was no longer an army of "unknown nationality". Abandoning all pretense at hiding their identity, they were applying unique magic and bipedal tanks with enchanted defenses to crush the volunteer unit's formation.

The Magicians from the Magic Association quickly retaliated with modern magic that was swift to cast with instantaneous effect, but they simply couldn't handle the overwhelming enemy numbers.

"Damn it, retreat!"

"Fall back and reestablish a new defensive line!"

It sounded like their morale had not broken, but in the face of such force, the only ones who could say so were the ones who fell back within the new protective line.

"Do not retreat!"

At this time, a roar shattered the volunteers' cowardice.

The avian chemical congregations that spewed fire were smashed to the earth and faded into ash.

It was as if they had been swatted aside by a giant hammer.

"Arise, ye who wield magic. Protect our homeland from falling into the clutches of these wretched invaders!"

Ahead of the volunteers, a bulky figure walked before them.

It was Katsuto, fully armored in protective gear and helmet like the samurais of old.

Katsuto raised his arm and swung it forward.

Although the swing was not made with great force,

But at the same time as the swing, one of the enemy's bipedal tanks collapsed.

The implication of this action was blatantly clear in everyone's eyes.

The same thing happened once more.

The mechanized weaponry with magically fortified defenses were being destroyed like toys.

A thunderous roar sounded all around him.

That was the triumphant shout of the volunteers who were previously in an inferior position.

Katsuto hid the feelings of shame deep in the pits of his heart.

He was not childish enough to believe in absolute justice.

Nor did he only seek personal advancement like an adult.

But he was very clear on the role that fell to him.

The enemy didn't take very long to recover their wits.

They were not very clear on exactly what Katsuto did.

Still, even the dullest of their men knew that Katsuto was the one who launched the magical attacks.

The bipedal tanks leveled their weapons at Katsuto with the churning of treads. Not one, but three tanks attacked as one unit. Apparently, the enemy was nothing more than inept soldiers who could only rely on their equipment.

However, the result was that none of the three bipedal tanks could advance a single a meter, nor could they fire a single bullet.

The only thing Katsuto did was to simply reach out with his right palm.

That alone was enough to render the bipedal tanks into scrap.

Multi-Layer Barrier Magic "Phalanx".

This magic was not only used to block the enemy's attack.

Its true value lay in its ability to annihilate the enemy and it existed for this purpose.

The magic behind Phalanx lay in constructing multiple barriers, so even if the initial barrier faltered, the one behind would simply replace it, to be continued ad infinitum.

The barriers were in constant motion within set boundaries.

The barrier was not set in front of oneself, but rather dozens of barriers were sent crashing at high speeds into the enemy.

This was the true usage of Phalanx on the offensive. The offensive barrier that possessed the sole function of being impermeable to all attacks could even be spread out within another person's magic. The magic barrier that set matter as its target possessed an interference strength that simply disallowed any other magic to exist.

Although there were disadvantages in that the firing range was limited and it could only be used against existing phenomena, this magic that combined attacking the enemy, anti-object, and anti-magic properties had powerful applications at short distances in group combat.

Defensively, there were multiple barriers being erected simultaneously.

Offensively, multiple barriers with a single characteristic could be fired successively.

As befitting the name "Phalanx", this was a magic that combined offense and defense together.

Fire and thunder came crashing down on Katsuto.

Ancient Magic attacks that had to go through various procedures and could not affect the Eidos without physical phenomena changes were the easiest opponents for Katsuto.

In the air, he erected heat resistant and lightning resistant barriers to protect himself and the volunteers surrounding him.

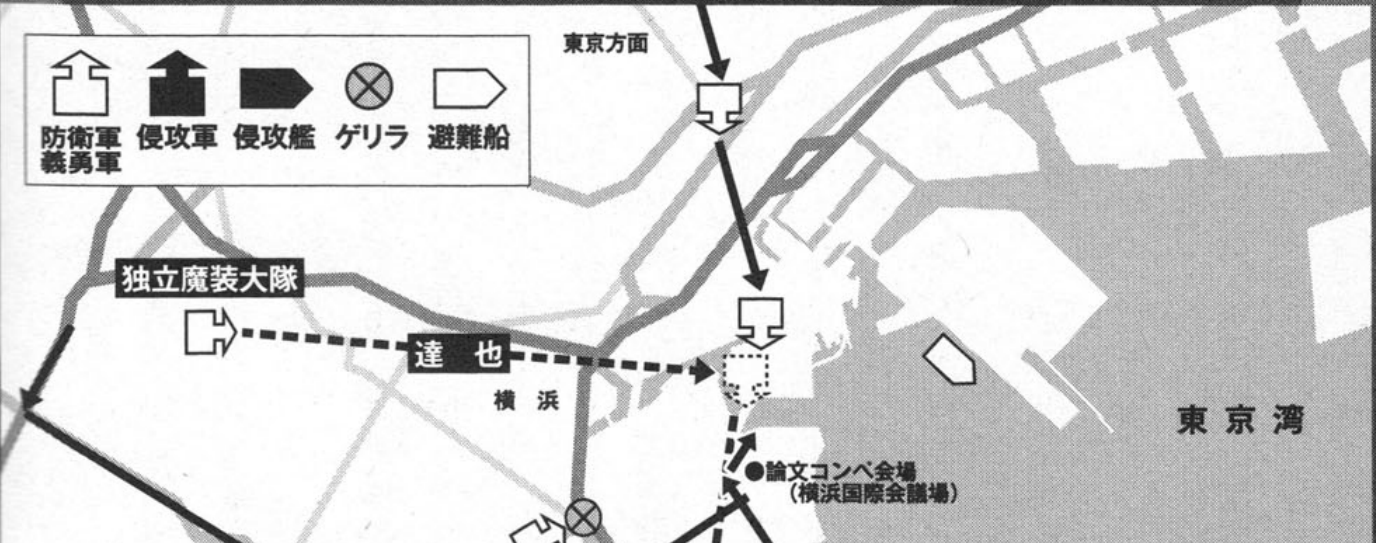
Along with the escorting soldiers at the front, he sent the enemy Magicians flying.

The advent of a single person completely turned the battle around.

◊ ◊ ◊

Exhausted by constantly having to deal with phantom attacks, Masaki changed his mind.

横浜事変
概略図
4


防衛軍
義勇軍
侵攻軍
侵攻艦
ゲリラ
避難船
東京方面
独立魔装大隊
達　也
横　浜
東京湾
●論文コンペ会場
（横浜国際会議場）
達也救援
一高地上組
野毛山●
横浜港
●管制ビル
将輝参戦
●
石川町
克人参戦
（横浜ベイヒルズタワー）
横須賀方面

西暦2095年10月30日
午後5時 現在

He stopped hunting for the enemy's Magicians and decided to massacre all the enemies around him.

Until now, he was afraid of dragging the average citizen into the crossfire so he had relied on magic that targeted individual enemies, but if the situation continued progressing the way it had, more and more citizens would suffer. —He was not going to deny that he was getting enraged.

Masaki set the area where the enemy was most densely congregated in three man squads as the square shaped execution site.

Each side measured 15 meters. Just in case, he kept a 2 meter buffer zone (until now, there was no sign that the enemy forcibly entered the nearby buildings).

He operated the CAD on his left wrist and activated the magic.

Unrelated to physical obstacles, this was a power that devoured cover in order to alter the phenomena.

The initial change was gradual.

The enemy soldiers would only feel a slight increase in body heat.

However, this would quickly turn into burning hot pain that led the victim to roll around on the floor. Thirty seconds later, their eyes would turn murky and they would be rendered a corpse.

This was Heat Magic that relied on the oscillation of fluid molecules, "Kyokan Jigoku".

The Magicians of the Ichijou Family specialized in Dispersal-Type Magic that evaporated fluids, but that certainly did not imply they could not use any other magic.

With apologies to his friend, Masaki actually suspected the veracity of the "Cardinal Code Hypothesis". If the Four Great Systems and Eight Major Types of Magic were flawlessly interconnected, then weren't they by nature the same entity? This was his gut speaking and not a logical theory. He felt that using systems to categorize magic was simply a matter of convenience.

Currently, the magic that Masaki was using, "Kyokan Jigoku", could be described as an inferior version of "Rupture".

Compared to "Rupture" that could instantaneously evaporate fluids, "Kyokan Jigoku" required time (nothing more than 30 seconds to a full minute) to increase fluid temperature. By paying the price in sheer firepower, this magic expanded the range from "target object" to "a wide area".

Within the summoned cauldron of hell — needless to say, this was a metaphor — rapid destabilization spread throughout the square shaped area.

"Kyokan Jigoku" was a magic that directly affected the human body within the targeted area. Thus, it was very difficult to affect Magicians who applied Data Fortification to themselves.

On the other hand, that also meant that Magicians were the only ones who could survive the execution site.

(Found you!)

There were many enemies, but Masaki's instincts told him that this Magician was the one who was responsible for the illusion magic.

He charged out from behind the building and sprinted into the "execution site" that was suddenly wide open.

The guns pointed in his direction were silenced by allied covering fire.

Once more, he raised the handgun-shaped Specialized CAD at the Magician who attempted to flee.

He pulled the trigger before the other man had a chance to turn around.

A crimson flower blossomed.

Masaki eliminated the enemy Magician before he even had time to surrender.

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Small thunderbolts danced wildly across the street as the enemy gunfire came to an end.

Miyuki's company still encountered sporadic resistance from the enemy, but they no longer saw any bipedal tanks or APCs coming to reinforce the enemy.

After Mikihiko's lightning magic rendered the enemy infantry impotent, the five of them gathered under the cover of one of the large buildings.

"Saegusa-senpai appears to be coming by helicopter to pick us up. Unlike the ones used for the civilians, this helicopter is specifically reserved for our evacuation."

Receiving Mayumi's communique, Miyuki relayed the details to everyone else.

"As expected of Saegusa, how generous."

Erika was moved in a rather odd direction.

"I think this has nothing to do with generosity... It must be so that the upperclassmen can safely escape."

"Even so, that's something worthy of thanks."

"Indeed. Thanks to that, we also have a chance to evacuate."

Mikihiko, Leo, and Mizuki were only able to chat so leisurely because the enemy attacks had gone silent.

"Ah, is that them?"

Even without Erika pointing this out, the distinctive sound of a propeller could be heard. Originally, they picked a location that wouldn't take very long to walk back from. Besides the time spent lifting off and setting down, this was a negligible distance for a helicopter. Yet after a few moments passed, the helicopter still hadn't arrived. Plainly, the noise was traveling down from above, but there was no sign of the helicopter.

Miyuki received a ping indicating that a new message had arrived, so she moved the transmission receiver to her ear.

"Miyuki? I'm sorry, but the area is too narrow to land. We'll let down the ropes for you, so can you grab hold of them?"

Before she could respond, five ropes came trailing down from nowhere above them.

Upon closer inspection, the highest point of the rope showed a heat signature that was hovering back and forth.

"...Invisibility, no, more like optical camouflage. Nicely done, Honoka."

Murmuring to herself, Miyuki grabbed hold of the rope and put one foot through the step at the bottom end.

The other four hurriedly followed suit.

After boarding the helicopter, everyone else save for Miyuki, who already knew about it from earlier, finally became aware of what Honoka was doing.

Honoka was projecting images of the sky using a hemispherical display and was so intensely focused that she could not even spare energy to speak. If this wasn't the sky and was a more dynamically changing scenery, there was definitely no way she could keep up the optical camouflage while moving.

"Even so, this magic can also be used when setting ambushes."

"Seriously, trying to maintain such a complicated process isn't something that can be done with a little imitation here and there."

"Even Miyuki can't do it?"

She could only do her best to ignore her friends' conversing voices.

"We're almost there, but if you feel tired, it's OK to disengage it as well."

"I'm fine."

It was all Honoka could do to muster a response to Mayumi's encouragement.

However, when the time came to extract Mari's group, the situation could not proceed as planned.

Perhaps it was more accurate to say that the enemy was engaged in their last desperate struggle. Watching the scene develop from on high, Mayumi and the others could see that the center of the battle had moved to the area surrounding China Street and the enemies in the immediate area had almost been entirely eradicated.

Nevertheless, Mari's squad of 5 was still under furious attacks that primarily came from rifles and grenade launchers from infantry units that had Magicians mixed in. Not knowing that Toshikazu was holding off all the attacks from the rear by himself, Mayumi and company did not waver because of their limited numbers and immediately provided cover for the five people below.

Correction, "Mayumi and company" would be the wrong term, since Mayumi was the only one who unleashed supporting magic from the helicopter.

Hail descended on the enemy soldiers.

Rather than small grains of ice, dry ice pellets rained down at supersonic speed to penetrate armor, a phenomenon utterly impossible in nature.

This was the "Magic Shooter" using dry ice as bullets.

The crossfire from the bullets came from all sorts of different angles to strike the enemy soldiers' head, back, and flanks. They were struck down without even knowing where the magic came from.

Using air to ground fire and aided by the advantage that the attacks came from unknown directions, Mayumi's magic pacified the scene in less than 5 minutes.

"Sorry for the wait, Mari. We're letting down the rope, so grab ahold."

"Ah, thanks."

The overwhelming firepower — she wasn't sure if this was the right way to put it — that Mayumi provided easily suppressed the enemy forces, which irked Mari somewhat as she called for the Year 2 students.

Isori and Kanon, Kirihara and Sayaka ran forward in pairs.

They forgot to be wary of their surroundings, but this was a hard charge to lay at their door.

Up until now, they were knee deep in the maelstrom of battle.

Also, the helicopter overhead had disengaged its optical camouflage, providing a lulling sense of security.

Except, the true value of guerrillas was shown here when conducting surprise attacks.

"Watch out!"

The shout came from Mari.

The first to hear this and move was Kirihara.

Sprinting towards Sayaka, he whirled his blade.

Although the frantically activated Sonic Blade miraculously deflected the bullets aimed at the chest, that only protected his torso.

His leg was struck by bullets.

The right leg beneath the thigh was in tatters.

"Kirihara-kun!"

"Kei!"

On the other side, Isori pushed Kanon down and covered her with his body.

Fresh blood flowed down his back.

The wound was caused by grenade shrapnel — it looked to be a fatal injury.

"Kei! Kei!"

"Kirihara-kun! Hang in there!"

Two girls were sobbing.

Mari unleashed magic against the irregulars who launched the surprise attack.

However, her magic was drowned in the overpowering interference strength that covered the scene and fizzled.

She frantically looked to the side — and her gaze fell upon the source.

There, leaping down from the helicopter was Miyuki, landing lightly on the earth as if entirely free from the bounds of gravity. Fearlessly, she raised her right hand.

Miyuki had lost her temper.

For her, Isori and Kirihara were nothing more than acquaintances.

Yet, using despicable means to hurt people she knew was enough to ignite the furnace of wrath within her.

Despite her rage, her brain remained calm as usual.

Even if she jumped down on reflex, she had a perfect grasp on the gravity that pulled her down.

There was no need to use a CAD.

Now, with her magic territory released, the only thing she needed to consider was how to construct her favorite unique magic.

Miyuki wasn't just sealing Tatsuya's power.

In order to seal Tatsuya's power, Miyuki spent half of her own magic on her brother.

The fact that Miyuki's magic went out of control was a side effect of suppressing her brother's magic.

Now, with Tatsuya's might unleashed, Miyuki's personal power was also released.

The Yotsuba Family did not have a signature appellation.

That was because each individual possessed a unique ability that could not be categorized, though no one deviated from the principle that "magic is inherited".

Miyuki's mother possessed the unique External Systematic Magic that could interfere with another person's mental makeup.

Thus, it would be no surprise if her daughter inherited some sort of mental interference magic.

Also, she was able to serve as Tatsuya's limiter precisely because she possessed mental interference magic.

Indeed — her Freezing Magic, which originally derives from it, is the manifestation of her innate magic interfering with the physical world.

She stretched her right hand out.

By this action alone, the world froze.

It was as if the world centered around Miyuki had frozen solid.

The surface of the road and the walls were not covered in frost.

What was frozen was the world of the consciousness.

There was no change from Mari, Kanon, Sayaka, as well as the critically injured Kirihara and Isori when they brushed against that wall.

However, the enemy soldiers who were pointing guns or getting ready to throw grenades, regardless of whether they were regular troops or guerrillas, all stood there stiffly without moving a muscle.

They weren't frozen, merely halted in place.

Rather than their physical bodies freezing, their minds were frozen.

External Systematic·Mental Interference Magic "Cocytus".

The frozen mind shall never awaken.

The frozen mind cannot comprehend death. There was no way to even inform the flesh that death was upon them.

The bodies bound by their frozen minds could not even die. They could only collapse like a row of statues, forever captured in the postures before the frost came.

No one could explain what Miyuki did.

But all beheld the image of the frozen world.

Everyone's instincts informed them that Miyuki did something.

Even without words, they could feel that mind-crushing terror.

Miyuki turned to one side before gazing skyward and drooping her head once more with traces of a lonely smile lingering on her face.

However, she immediately raised her head and cried out while waving her hands.

"Onii-sama!"

Directly in front of her eyes, everyone besides Isori and Kirihara could see this.

There, the figure of a soldier in pitch black descended to ground level.

He landed near Miyuki and removed the protective visor and goggles.

Tatsuya ran to Isori's side with a grim expression on his countenance.

"Onii-sama, please!"

By his side, Miyuki grabbed hold of Tatsuya's right hand.

Tatsuya nodded and pulled out the CAD on the left side of his waist.

"What are you doing!?"

And pointed the silver CAD at Isori.

There was no time to stop him.

The only thing Kanon could do was scream at him.

He pulled the trigger.

On reflex, Kanon closed her eyes.

[Commence Retroactive Eidos Tracking]

Tatsuya's expression did not change.

[......Confirm Restoration Point]

The time required for this magic was overly minuscule.

Yet during this instant, Miyuki knew that her brother was suffering unimaginable pain. Miyuki's eyes deftly caught the trickle of sweat running down Tatsuya's face.

Unconsciously, Miyuki averted her gaze.

Nevertheless, in the eyes of the biological machine casting magic that Tatsuya embodied, no trace of extraneous information was reflected.

[Restoration Commence]

The other magic that Tatsuya could freely wield, "Regrowth", activated.

He backtracked through the changes in the Eidos and obtained the one an instant before any injuries occurred and then copied that.

He copied that information onto the Magic Sequence and applied it to the Eidos.

Events were accompanied by information,

And information can alter the event.

In accordance with the basic rules of magic, the injured flesh began to change.

It was regenerating back towards its uninjured state.

Rather than healing the injury, the truth called injury was being erased.

The restorative power of the world was cooperating with the changes being cast on Isori's flesh.

The shrapnel was "devoured" by Isori's body.

The fragments in Isori's body disappeared.

Rather than being decomposed, they somehow fell by his side.

Isori's body seemed to glow with light.

In the next instant, there wasn't even a trace of a wound on his body.

Not only that, even the bloodstains on his clothes were fading.

[Restoration complete]

In a state unharmed by any shrapnel, Isori's flesh and body stabilized within the world.

Tatsuya didn't even have time to confirm the results of "Regrowth" on Isori before turning to Kirihara and pulling the trigger on his CAD again.

Visually speaking, this was even more dramatic.

Seeing the shredded leg and thigh reconnect, Kirihara's body also began to glow.

Next, a hale young man with all four limbs was lying there.

Tatsuya returned the CAD to his left waist and wordlessly embraced Miyuki.

"Ah...!"

Both of his arms encircling the wide-eyed Miyuki, Tatsuya softly whispered something in her ear before releasing her.

Stepping back, he put on the protective visor and pulled down the goggles.

Returning to a completely black form, Tatsuya thumbed the power switch on his belt and returned to the skies.

Miyuki could only blankly follow him with her eyes.

Her brother's words "Well done" continued to reverberate in her ears.

Wearing a skeptical expression, Isori started examining his own body.

Utterly astounded as she watched her lover's body, Kanon suddenly burst into tears and threw her arms around Isori.

On the other side, Kirihara tilted his head slightly as he repeatedly alternated between hopping on one foot and standing on one foot with Sayaka smiling through her tears as she watched him.

Miyuki turned her head when she heard the light footsteps behind her. Behind her stood Erika, who also leaped down from the helicopter and was still carrying the odachi that was taller than she was.

"Nice work. That magic was incredible."

Seeing Erika strike up a conversation just as usual, Miyuki let out a reserved smile in response. —A smile that smacked of some sort of fear.

"...Before Onii-sama, even Thanatos must bow. But that magic..."

"Hm? No, I know Tatsuya's magic was amazing too, but I was talking about Miyuki's magic. As expected of Miyuki, magic that only targets and strikes at enemies is simply awesome."

Erika's expression was not an act, nor was it forced in any way.

She was simply praising Miyuki's outstanding ability.

There was no sign of horror.

So,

"—Thank you."

Miyuki also replied with a typical, natural response.

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After being repulsed from the northern face of one of the hills near the Magic Association side branch, the invading forces looped back to launch their last assault from the south.

They had completely abandoned any idea of taking hostages.

Currently, they did not possess the troops to occupy the area for any duration of time.

At the current rate, the only thing they could do was retreat empty-handed. At the very least, the invasion force decided that they needed to seize the documents related to modern magic stored at the Magic Association side branch and kill as many Magicians as possible to decrease this country's available firepower.

Grasping the appropriate time to retreat was extremely difficult.

Retreating was difficult enough after winning an advantage, but without any clear signs of imminent defeat, they couldn't simply abandon the field without anything to show for themselves.

They would blunt the enemy attack then counterattack as they were retreating.

This tactic firmly placed all the momentum on their side, the CO of the maneuvering unit believed, hence morale remained high.

The mobile force that only consisted of APCs and bipedal tanks had yet to encounter the enemy.

This operation was devised under the assumption that the defending forces lacked mobility. The CO riding in the APC believed this assessment to be correct.

Exactly at that moment.

The soldier on guard who poked half his body out of the rear of the APC raised his head when he noticed black shadows flying overhead.

However, this soldier was unable to discern the identity of these black shadows before a bullet fired from the sky hit him in the head.

Amid panicked communication between the invading vehicles, all their weapons raised skyward.

The unit in black descended rapidly from the sky as if mocking their paltry response — the flying detachment from the Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion dropped onto the roof of the skyscraper next to the side of the road and started firing from above.

Rifle bullets empowered with increased penetration fell like rain and pierced the bipedal tanks whose magic defenses had already been shredded.

Concentrated explosions from grenades also took out the wheels on the APCs and burning hot shrapnel ignited the fuel into an inferno.

It's not that the invaders offered no resistance on their part.

Heavy autocannon turrets fired along the wall and took down the flying soldiers peering through their firing spots.

Yet, the firepower from the unit in black never slackened.

Rolling flames danced across the rubble, but atop the perforated roof, the incoming shots only intensified.

The invading soldiers in the APCs and bipedal tanks now knew the terror of fighting undying monsters.

Immediately, they had the opportunity to witness this unique ability in action.

One of the flying soldiers crumpled and fell on the roadside.

He managed to avoid instant death thanks to the bulletproof properties of the pitch black armor, but that was undeniably a fatal injury.

At this time, an obsidian demon dual wielding two silver CADs descended next to his body. The one in his left hand pointed at that soldier and the soldier's wounds vanished.

The CAD in his right hand locked onto one of their bipedal tanks.

Noise suffused the machinery covered in armor, then the entire 3.5 meter tall mobile weapon faded into dust.

"...Mahesvara![3]"

A terrified scream tore across the radio.

Some attempted to flee in terror while others chose to resist in horror. These two conflicting urges completely destroyed any semblance of order in the invasion force.

Amid the panic, the only ending that awaited them was eradication.

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The bridge of the camouflaged amphibious vessel, also known as the command center of the invasion force, was covered by a solemn and heavy atmosphere.

"The mobile force was completely destroyed...?"

The tactician had just finished giving his full report to the CO who was staring at him, but he still fulfilled his duty as an advisor.

"Based on the reports we received, an aerial unit using Flying-Type Magic attacked and destroyed our entire force."

"..."

"...Also, there is an unconfirmed report..."

"Of what?"

"Communications from the mobile forces mentioned 'Mahesvara'."

"Did you say 'Mahesvara'!?"

Over half of the crew on the bridge widened their eyes so much that it was incredible none of them popped from their sockets.

"There were troops in the mobile force who participated in the battle 3 years ago."

"..."

"...Did something happen?"

One of the remaining staff members questioned the tactician who made the report rather than the commanding officer.

"—What a pack of lies!"

However, the one who replied was the CO himself.

Three years ago, an unidentified demon smashed them at Okinawa.

Among the soldiers who returned through prisoner exchange, none dared to utter that title.

The upper echelons of the Great Asian Alliance military officially denied his existence.

They forbade the soldiers from mentioning that name.

It was a nightmare better left buried.

Yet, no matter how they denied him with their lips, the nightmare had become reality and was baring its fangs at them.

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Fully utilizing the mobility of the flying detachment from the Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion, they swept to the rear of the enemy forces engaging the volunteer forces and outflanked them.

Only 40 soldiers were committed to the front, which was the size of a small company, but the movement speed of troops that defied conventional wisdom practically multiplied their numbers 2 to 3 times.

Also, there was no need to worry about casualties.

The pitch black armor that they wore — the Mobile Suit, prided itself in its bulletproof properties.

In addition, all troops in combat were highly capable Magicians, so their magic defenses from interference strength were also solid.

Even so, they couldn't block everything the enemy threw at them. Personal armor brought along its own weight limitations no matter what, and when compared with the armor on tanks or combat vessels, there was plainly going to be a durability difference.

Hence some of them occasionally took hits.

Or were injured in explosions.

Sometimes their torso or abdomen was shot through.

However, so long as they did not die instantly they could not be stopped. Soldiers who fell in a pool of blood because of enemy fire would get back to their feet in the next instant as if nothing had happened.

There was no sign of injury on their bodies, nor were there bloodstains on their equipment. Not only that, there weren't even holes in their armor.

The tall soldier dual-wielding silver CADs pulled the trigger of the CAD in his left hand and the fallen soldiers would recover.

Released from the clutches of death, the soldiers attacked like Asura made flesh.

The invading troops could not believe their eyes.

They plainly dealt fatal damage, but that truth no longer existed.

They even suspected if they were daydreaming, or in the vilest of nightmares.

Their sense of reality was being eroded by the cause and effect relationship they beheld with their eyes.

The left hand holding the silver CAD was reviving the soldiers in black — even though they had no idea what was going on, all of the invading troops instinctively aimed their weapons at the soldier wielding the silver CAD.

However, not one shot struck their mark. Bullets and shrapnel dissipated like mist in the air. Anything that the right hand pointed at faded away into dust.

— Divine Left —

Soldiers on the brink of death would revive when the left hand fell upon them.

— Demon Right —

Man and machine faded into oblivion before that right hand.

Three years ago, soldiers from Hong Kong used English phrases to get around the gag order from above. Today, that term spread like wildfire through the invading forces.

— Mahesvara! —

Their morale drowned in a rising tide of horror.

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The enemy's attack slackened at an unnatural time.

Based on Katsuto's estimation, there should be some time left before the enemy broke away and fled.

Still, even though this was ahead of schedule, Katsuto was not one to let this opportunity slip away.

"The enemy is falling back!"

Among the volunteer units formed primarily from the Magic Association, he definitely belonged to the youngest strata.

Irrelevant to this, Katsuto naturally held the command for this position.

There were people present with keen eyes that could see past his appearance to discern his true age.

Yet, no one objected to the leadership qualities that he possessed.

Of course, the fact that his Magic Power utterly surpassed anyone present played a dominating role in that decision.

Everyone present knew that had he not joined the battle, the side that would be pushed to the brink of disaster would be their own.

Nonetheless, it wasn't through his power alone.

Power was actually the secondary reason.

The volunteers acknowledged Katsuto as their commander because his roar dispelled their weakness. In reality, supply lines were integral to winning a war, just as the degree of training for soldiers was also important. Highly efficient troop transportation, delivery of supplies and communication were all vital in war.

However, after excluding all of those, the bottom line still came back to morale.

The soldiers' fighting spirit sometimes led to victory despite inferior conditions.

At least for land based battles, the fact that morale was integral to victory will likely remain unchanged for a long time.

Thus, it was up to the commander to access that rare ability to evoke the soldiers' fighting spirit.

"Press forward together!"

Complying with Katsuto's orders, an array of magic was released together.

There was no mutual interference that led to magic nullification because everyone was using Gravity-Type Magic to bombard the enemy.

For the invading troops that were frantically trying to retreat, this attack was the straw that broke the camel's back.

Most of the infantry and Magicians who had not boarded the mechanized units were taken out.

The APCs and bipedal tanks that managed to sustain the barrage began to flee with a small group of soldiers and Magicians.

Standing on top of an overturned bipedal tank, Katsuto continued to use Phalanx to attack while swinging his arm forward.

"Advance!"

That was the order to pursue and deny the enemy any chance to regroup.

The volunteers' morale reached the high water mark.

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Just like Katsuto, Masaki had no idea that the enemy was starting to collapse because of the Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion's attacks from the rear.

Still, he too grasped that the winds had changed and seized the opportunity almost at the same time that Katsuto did.

Just as Katsuto served in the leadership capacity for the volunteers, Masaki also proactively directed the battle and was standing at the forefront of battle to protect his comrades.

Currently, he was standing at China Street's north (Black Tortoise) gate. This street was the result of redevelopment after the war with large buildings that could serve as walls, leaving only the four gates in the north, south, east, and west for entry. This wasn't a disorganized redevelopment and probably was the result of meticulous planning.

This might be for closing down shop, or to seal the gates for defense.

The latter was more probable.

The four gates that were usually open because of an endless stream of tourists were currently shut tightly.

Masaki didn't plan on being picky. Still, he was a little irked that they were blatantly living on foreign soil, yet were only protecting their own people and even turning this into a stronghold (?).

Still, the reason he stood before the northern gate wasn't because he wanted to vent his frustration.

"Open the gate! Otherwise, we will assume you are in league with the invaders!"

The reason Masaki stood there fully prepared for battle was because the enemy had fled into China Street.

There was no telling when bullets would fly in his direction.

They might even be accompanied by grenades or magic.

Nor was there a guarantee that powerful explosives or magic that could break through these magical defenses wouldn't come flying from above.

Hence he stood alone while on heightened alert and was ready at a moment's notice to unleash his magic.

Even though he said otherwise, Masaki had long since made the decision to forcibly breach the perimeter when the time came.

If the gates opened immediately upon request, then surely they wouldn't have fled to this street in the first place.

Even if the people living on this street weren't in cahoots with the enemy forces, then the enemy troops must have seized the door mechanism first when they entered. It was highly unlikely that the unarmed civilians could offer anything beyond token resistance.

However, after his cry, the doors gradually opened before Masaki's astounded gaze.

A small group of people came out led by a young man with an aristocratic air about him who was five to six years older than Masaki.

They were bringing the bound invaders with them.

"My name is Zhou Gongjin[4]."

The young man announced his name.

"...Zhou Gongjin?"

"That's my real name."

Young Zhou was used to this sort of reaction. Seeing Masaki tilt his head, the young man laughed pleasantly.

"My apologies. I am Ichijou Masaki."

Ignoring the older man's self-introduction too long was discourteous, so Masaki panicked a little, but after considering their mutual positions, he cautiously identified himself.

In response, the young man bowed deeply and gestured for the prisoners of war (strictly speaking, they were captives and not prisoners of war) to be handed over to Masaki.

"We are not in league with the invaders. In fact, we are also victims. To prove our point, please allow us to offer our assistance."

The young man wore a sincere expression as he pleaded his case.

Here, at least on the surface, there appeared to be no trace of falsehood.

Yet Masaki didn't entirely believe him.

Still, he didn't sound like he was putting on an act.

Young Zhou insisted that they allowed the invaders to enter solely to lower their guard before capturing them.

This logical argument certainly had its own weight.

On the other hand, exactly how did they manage to subjugate fully armed soldiers?

He definitely couldn't lower his guard.

This was the impression Masaki had of Zhou.

That being said, Masaki did not have the authority to comprehensively investigate any random individual.

In addition, on the surface, their assistance would put an end to the conflict in this sector.

Masaki expressed his thanks to Zhou and cooperated with the other volunteers to take possession of the bound enemy soldiers.

However, Masaki did not notice that this action would remove him from the front lines.

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The interior of the helicopter that was flying inland along the coast was completely silent.

For some reason, the atmosphere was one where everyone was afraid to speak.

Still, there was no way they could just sit there and withstand that unnatural silence.

"...Despite this happening to my own body... Even now I still find this hard to believe."

The one who started muttering to himself was Isori.

"...What the heck just happened? What did he do to achieve such a result?"

Not directed towards anyone in particular, the other person who expressed his own bemusement was Kirihara, the other person in question.

"Why not simply see all of that as a hallucination. That might be more persuasive."

"But, that wasn't a hallucination. I almost died, your leg was torn to shreds, those are the indisputable facts."

Silence descended once more. Once more coming to grips with those profound facts, the atmosphere was even heavier than before.

"...Shiba, just tell me this."

Finally, that was probably the right way to describe this.

Mari asked a question of Miyuki, who was the only one among them who knew the truth.

"What would you like to know?"

The tone of the response was incredibly calm.

Yet, she was unable to disguise the stiffness of her expression.

No, maybe she never intended to hide it in the first place.

It was possible that Miyuki was intentionally wearing a chilly, crystal expression.

"How long will Tatsuya-kun's magic last?"

Using magic to heal was only a temporary measure. That was the basic rule of healing magic.

By constantly recasting the magic during its effective period and repeatedly cheating the world, this was the only way to finally stabilize the illusion of healing in the actual world.

If the effective time was short, then a fresh application of healing was immediately necessary.

"It's perpetual."

However, her answer was completely unexpected.

"There is no need for recasts like conventional healing magic."

Miyuki's response encompassed all of Mari's concerns and was voiced specifically for Isori and Kirihara to hear.

"There is no restriction in motion. They are able to completely function as normal."

"Is such a thing possible?"

Mari wore a skeptical expression at this reply.

"You don't believe me."

"It's not that I don't believe you..."

Mari wasn't the only who couldn't comprehend this.

"I am very thankful that he saved Kei... But I've never heard of healing magic that results in complete healing after one cast. This runs counter to the basic laws of healing magic. Is he really healed? Does that even qualify as healing magic? What the hell did Shiba-kun do!?"

"Kanon-chan, calm down."

Mayumi gently coaxed Kanon to rein in her excitement.

"Miyuki-chan, please don't think poorly of her, OK? Kanon-chan is just really worried about Isori."

Hearing Mayumi's interjection, Miyuki smiled slightly in response.

"Still, I am very intrigued by exactly what he did. Since this isn't healing magic, what exactly..."

"Mari! Inquiring about other people's magic is forbidden!"

Just when the atmosphere turned a little congenial, Mari's statement immediately disrupted the balance and prompted a severe warning from Mayumi.

"Thank you, Saegusa-senpai. However, I think it's fine."

Yet Miyuki expressed her gratitude towards Mayumi's concerns but also mentioned that there was no need to worry on their behalf.

"I believe that it's only natural to think I would mind. Nonetheless, if it's only to explain this to everyone here, I think Onii-sama wouldn't object."

This was also a subtle hint to keep this to themselves. If they could not keep this a secret, then this would be as far as the conversation proceeded.

"I'll keep my mouth shut."

"I won't tell anyone."

With that, both Mari and Kanon replied in this manner.

The other members also swore likewise.

"I will keep anything I heard confidential, even towards Nakura."

In the end, even Mayumi spoke up.

"Oh, it's hardly anything that outrageous..."

Miyuki revealed a rare, wry smile.

No matter how Mayumi swore to keep her secrets, in the end, this would still flow into the ears of the Saegusa Family.

Even then, Miyuki judged that this would be OK.

At the end of the day, it's not like anyone could replicate this anyway.

"The magic that Onii-sama used was not healing magic."

Sitting in an upright posture, Miyuki quietly began.

This way, even the listeners reflected her posture.

"The name of the magic is 'Regrowth'. Changes in the Eidos can be rewound up to 24 hours in the past, copying and rewriting the Eidos from before any damages or harm from external sources were incurred, then using Magic Sequences to rewrite the current Eidos. The rewritten target will adhere to the updated information and restore itself to before any harm was suffered."

Miyuki paused for a moment after saying this and looked over everyone else.

"Now that I mention it, does everyone know why the effects of magic are only temporary?"

After asking the question, Miyuki continued without giving anyone a chance to respond.

"The effects of magic are not eternal because the restorative powers of Eidos are at work. The restorative power of the Eidos tries to revert itself to before any external alterations occurred. However, the rewritten Eidos from 'Regrowth' is only the target's own information from before. If you're being rewritten by your own Eidos, there is no need to revert to the time of injury and will remain in this world in a state where the injury never happened. All of this becomes as if nothing had ever happened."

Mari and Kanon exchanged a glance.

Mayumi blinked several times.

Isori's body went stiff and Kirihara wore a gobsmacked expression.

There were all sorts of expressions, but the sentiment being expressed was all the same.

"...Then, Tatsuya can heal any injury in one try, is that it? That's almost impossible to believe. Even for Tatsuya, this is..."

Mikihiko was the one who verbalized his internal monologue.

"Not in one try, Yoshida-kun."

Miyuki smiled and denied his words.

"It's practically instantaneous. In addition, the target is not restricted to biological organisms. Onii-sama can restore anything, regardless of whether it's the human body or a piece of machinery."

Miyuki was highly entertained by Mikihiko standing there with his jaw doing its best to reach the ground, but at the same time, a lonely smile appeared on her face.

"Because of this magic, Onii-sama cannot freely wield other magics. Since his magic territory is dominated by this divine ability, there is no room for any other magic."

Although she described it as divine, no one present believed that was an exaggeration.

This was no exaggeration, this was a "miracle".

"...That's why Tatsuya-kun seems so unbalanced."

"Ah... With such a high class magic on hand, it's not surprising that other magics would be obstructed..."

Miyuki only told them half the truth. She opted against revealing the other half.

That was why she only wore a lonely smile as she watched her easily misled senpais converse with one another.

"...But isn't that amazing. He can eliminate any major injury suffered in the past 24 hours, right?"

Kanon's sudden interjection broke through the doom and gloom.

"Indeed. It doesn't matter if it's a disaster area or battlefield, there are countless people who need help. He could save thousands, even tens of thousands of lives."

As he finally grasped the meaning behind all this, Isori warmly agreed with Kanon.

"Yeah! Compared to that, not using any other magic is only a minor hassle. Why is such an incredible power kept under wraps? You see, he could save so many more people with this. Rather than becoming infamous through taking the lives of others, he would be renowned for saving others. He could be a true hero!"

"Is that so... The power to erase any injury, no matter the severity. And you dare to insinuate that such a magic would come at no cost?"

A complete contrast to Kanon's excitement, Miyuki was terribly calm, her face devoid of any expression.

Her chilly, piercing gaze seemed to root Kanon to the spot.

Although this was the first time they saw this, no matter if it was Kanon, Mari, Mayumi, it suddenly dawned on everyone that Miyuki was using that crystalline expression to cover her wildly rampaging emotions and forcibly projecting an aura of calmness.

She, was in the throes of grief.

She, was furious beyond all reason.

"Onii-sama reviews the catalogue of changes in the Eidos to completely copy the Eidos. To do this, he must read all the stored information regarding the Eidos."

Miyuki's voice was still ever so calm to the point of being objective.

Yet, Mayumi and Mari, Kanon and Isori, everyone present who heard her words felt a chill crawl up their spine.

"And that, of course, includes the victim's pain."

Someone sharply inhaled.

"Pain is not read from an intellectual perspective. The feeling of pain, the signals of pain that travel through the injured body's nervous system, are directly transferred to your own side as direct information. That information does not pass through the brain, but is directly imprinted on your mind."

Cough, someone began hacking. This was not intentional, merely a biological side effect of being unable to breathe.

"Furthermore, all of that is condensed into an instant as it is transmitted. For example... In this situation, the time elapsed between Isori-senpai being wounded and Onii-sama arriving to use magic was approximately 30 seconds. Onii-sama used about 0.2 seconds to review all the changes in the Eidos. In that brief instance, the condensed pain that weighed on Onii-sama's mind is about 150 times Isori-senpai's suffering."

"One hundred and fifty times..."

A surprised gasp spilled from Isori's lips. He couldn't even begin to imagine that degree of pain.

In addition, Isori was also questioning whether he could master himself in the face of that sort of pain.

"The longer the duration of the wound, the greater the condensed pain. In order to erase an injury suffered one hour ago, the caster must suffer pain 10,000 times greater than the original."

While Miyuki was not channeling her rage at anyone other than herself, her gaze still drifted towards Kanon.

"Onii-sama must pay this price each time he heals someone else. With that in mind, do you still wish for him to wield this power for others?"

She was exceptionally calm, but also in a towering rage.

She was more enraged at herself than anyone else.

That was because the willful individual who requested her brother to use "Regrowth" was none other than herself.

◊ ◊ ◊

"Captain, allied forces are retreating!"

"Is that so."

Hearing his subordinate's report, Great Asian Alliance Special Ops Captain Chen Xiangshan's voice did not betray a hint of surprise or regret or anything else at all. He merely nodded his head, not because he had already predicted that there was a high probability of allied defeat, but because he had already taken into account this possibility when plotting out his objectives. There was no correlation between achieving combat objectives and victory in battle. He had climbed to his current position because he had always followed that creed.

"Currently, we will now begin Plan B."

There were 20 soldiers accompanying him. Although their numbers were few, each one of them was a specialist at disrupting enemy assets from the rear gathered from back home. They were of an entirely different sort than the infiltrators he originally brought with him.

"Lieutenant Lu."

Despite his mishap earlier, after taking into account his raw fighting ability, Chen still called out the name of his most trustworthy subordinate.

"I know you may think otherwise, but do not consider taking vengeance. Fixating on a relic of unknown value was a misstep from the outset."

"Understood."

No matter what his own thoughts on the matter were, Lu Gonghu perfectly modulated his voice when he responded to his superior officer. He was wearing his original equipment, the enchanted armor called the "White Tiger Armor".

"Move out."

In accordance with Chen's order, the unit quietly began to advance.

Their target lay ahead of them, the Kantou branch of the Japanese Magic Association in the Yokohama Bay Hills Tower.

◊ ◊ ◊

The heavy atmosphere on board the helicopter that Mayumi and the others were riding on was broken when Mizuki suddenly gasped.

"Mizuki, what is it?"

Miyuki, who was the center of the foreboding silence, gently asked the first question probably because she felt that it wouldn't do to keep going like this.

"Well, near the Bay Hills Tower, I thought I saw the flare of a bestial soul..."

Despite sitting in the helicopter, Mizuki occasionally removed her glasses to scan the ground. Although she only did so because she thought there might be the off chance she would catch something, this time she was definitely on the right track.

"Bestial? As in a bloodthirsty, violent sort of way?"

While directing his question to Mizuki, Mikihiko pulled out a talisman from his breast pocket before getting a reply. Mikihiko activated the spell, put it up to his eye and looked through the talisman at the Bay Hills Tower.

"Enemy attack!?"

Surprise caused his voice to hitch.

"Is that reliable?"

"I thought the enemy retreated before the volunteers' attack?"

Erika and Kanon immediately followed up with their own questions.

Mikihiko nodded at Erika's question, but shook his head at Kanon.

"A small number of enemies launched a surprise assault from the rear with a terrifying amount of spell power. We have to turn around quickly, the Magic Association is in danger!"

The last comment was directed towards Mayumi.

A hint of indecision floated across Mayumi's eyes as she looked to Mari.

"Mayumi Ojou-sama."

Nakura's voice came from the co-pilot's seat.

"There's an emergency call on the line reserved for the Ten Master Clans from the Magic Association."

"Patch it through."

Mayumi seized the ear set from Nakura.

Through the ear set, she heard the Magic Association member report the same dire situation that Mikihiko spoke of. Although the enemy numbers were few, there were limited Magicians at the Magic Association at this moment. At this rate, they wouldn't be able to hold out much longer.

Mayumi swiftly made a decision as if hesitation never crossed her mind.

"Nakura, turn towards the Magic Association."

Without waiting for a reply, Mayumi operated her own terminal and established a connection.

"Saegusa, what's going on?"

Katsuto's anxious voice that came down the line contained traces of frustration and confusion. Mayumi knew that Katsuto must have received the Magic Association's plea for help as well.

"Juumonji-kun, we will head towards the Magic Association."

Mayumi skipped the preliminaries and spoke quickly.

"The helicopter will immediately turn around, so we won't take very long. Juumonji-kun, you focus on defeating the enemy forces."

Katsuto didn't know that Mayumi's group was evacuating by helicopter, nor did Mayumi know that Katsuto was leading troops at the front line.

However, Mayumi believed that Katsuto definitely wouldn't sit idly by while the situation worsened. In addition, she knew that he would enter the battle and would serve as an essential part of the armed forces.

Even Juumonji Katsuto was not someone who could be in two places at the same time. He could not possibly defeat two enemies that came from different directions at the same time.

"I'm relying on you!"

"Leave it to me!"

After cutting the feed, the helicopter turned around and advanced forwards.

The surprise attack from Chen's detachment completely caught the Japanese forces unprepared. This wasn't because it was a surprise assault using a small detachment of troops, but because they had kept so many elite forces in reserve.

The Great Asian Alliance troops attacking along the coastline are currently (estimated) to be in a completely inferior position. The hillside forces were crushed by the volunteers under Katsuto's command and the inland forces had all been captured because of the betrayal at China Street. The troops at Sangechō were in complete disarray because of the flying troops in black. There was simply no additional troop strength left.

And yet, they were definitely being attacked by a small group of elite soldiers. Their size did not surpass one squad in strength, yet every single one of them was incredibly capable in battle. Especially that warrior garbed in white, Chinese-style armor who didn't even flinch at machine gun fire from APCs and broke through barricade after barricade until he reached the summit of the hill.

Alighting from the helicopter, Mayumi and company caught sight of him.

"That guy!?"

Seeing that soldier in white armor, or to be more precise, after feeling the aura he was giving off, Mari made a sound of pure astonishment.

"It's that man from before... I think he is called Lu Gonghu. Guess he managed to escape."

Mayumi squinted her eyes as she used Sensory-Type Magic to inspect the man's face.

"Lu Gonghu!?"

"Erika, do you know who he is?"

Erika nodded in raw excitement at Leo's inquiry.

"He's a strong one!"

"Eh~"

Still, upon hearing Erika's concise answer, Leo didn't seem cowed in the slightest and his eyes seemed to glow even brighter. Because of this, the pair of upperclassmen felt a headache eclipsing their initial worries.

Catching sight of the approaching enemy unit, Miyuki pulled out her CAD.

"Miyuki-chan, STOP!"

Mayumi was completely focused on Erika, but managed to catch wind of the danger in time and frantically stopped her.

"Do you want the Magic Association members' magic to fail as well!?"

Miyuki's favored magic targeted whole areas. Magic with weak interference strength would fizzle away when Miyuki unleashed her magic. If she could identify each individual situation, then she might be able to differentiate them enough to avoid interfering with allied magic, but Mayumi considered this to be impossible at a range where men looked to be the size of ants.

"Don't worry, I will end this in one strike!"

Sure enough, Miyuki's response implied that she was about to unleash a cruel attack that paid no heed to allies in the line of fire.

How could she say something so horrifying despite that adorable appearance, Mayumi felt her headache worsening.

"No, if something goes sideways, is Miyuki-chan the only one who will pay the price?"

While Miyuki's thoughts on Mayumi's comment revolved around "there's no way I would miss any of them", Miyuki still obediently put her CAD away since Mayumi was concerned on her behalf after all.

"Miyuki-chan, please protect the branch headquarters itself. I know this seems like I'm leaving all the responsibility to you, but the only one who can hold the fort is probably Miyuki-chan."

"Understood."

Although Mayumi's "request" strategy was plain to see, Miyuki still accepted her new mission.

"Kirihara-kun and Mibu-chan will accompany Miyuki, and can the two of you protect Shibata-san as well?"

This arrangement was blatantly taking Kirihara's recent injury into consideration, but Kirihara didn't object as he accepted his charge.

"Isori-kun, Kanon-chan, and Yoshida-kun, you three take care of the enemies besides the warrior in white."

After saying this, Mayumi glanced at Mari.

"Mari."

"Ah, we'll handle that guy. Erika, Saijou, you two are with me."

Mari nodded at Mayumi and looked towards Erika.

"I was going to do that even without you saying so!"

Leo chose to forgo saying anything, but he nodded gravely as he stood next to the combative Erika.

The White Tiger Armor that Lu Gonghu wore was a device enchanted through the Chinese Ancient Magic Daoism and could amplify his Steel Qigong. When wearing this White Tiger Armor, Lu Gonghu's world-renowned might as a close combat Magician could be put on full display.

The APC that replaced a standard barricade opened fire with its autocannon at Lu Gonghu with shells equivalent to high powered rifles, but Lu Gonghu brushed them aside easily. Not only were the areas covered in armor like so, even the uncovered portions were also the same. That was the result of amplifying Steel Qigong. The White Tiger was closest to "Gold" in the Five Phases. In this white armor, the Steel Qigong that covered Lu Gonghu entirely was strengthened further. With him in the vanguard breaking through every obstacle in their way, the ambush troops were drawing closer to the side branch of the Magic Association.

However, in front of the final barricade, Lu Gonghu caught sight of that accursed young woman. Lu Gonghu was thankful for this unexpected opportunity to avenge his earlier shame. Although he had acquiesced to Chen's order, the desire for vengeance burned fiercely within his bosom. Both his injuries across the ribs and back were fine so long as he wore the armor. Lu Gonghu charged towards the young woman twice responsible for his failures — Mari.

Holding her favored triblade that she received from the Magic Association — Mari always carried this hidden weapon on her, she prepared to meet his charge. Mari held the blade in her left hand while her right hand carried the CAD that was normally in her left hand. There were two kodachis attached to her belt along with many bottles of chemicals. The female combat uniform she wore was also lent by the Magic Association. Mari's equipment could cover all the bases, but Mari was clairvoyant on how long she could last against Lu Gonghu operating at peak capacity.

Completely indifferent to Mari's ability, Lu Gonghu took a slashing attack from Erika on his flank.

Yamatsunami.

The speed was too quick for Lu Gonghu to dodge. No, if he had noticed Erika from the outset he still could have pulled it off, but tunnel vision prevented Lu Gonghu from doing so.

Forced to respond to the sweeping odachi, Lu Gonghu raised both wrists to parry Orochimaru's attack. Rubble scattered everywhere at Lu Gonghu's feet from the impact. After the force from Yamatsunami was transferred into the ground, Lu Gonghu's Steel Qigong repelled the blade's attack.

"Ha!"

Someone let out a roar behind Lu Gonghu.

Synchronized with Leo's roar, Usuba Kagerou came sweeping in. The stroke was aimed towards the lower half of the body where Lu Gonghu's legs were.

If this was a full frontal assault perpendicular to the ground, Lu Gonghu might have ignored the attack completely based on the thickness of the blade. However, since it was an attack that ran parallel to the ground, the black shadow of the carbon nanotubes was reflected in Lu Gonghu's eyes.

Lu's body flew through the sky. He sent a flying kick with the force of a cannon ball at Leo and although Leo aimed at Lu's body and tried to turn his horizontal slash to a vertical one, there was no way he was going to make it.

"Heh?"

A short "hmph" came from Lu Gonghu's mouth as he slid through the sky.

While taking a shot at Leo, Mayumi's magic caught up to Lu Gonghu. Each of the shots carried little weight, but several hundred shots impacting on him would definitely send him flying. Lu Gonghu's flying kick was diverted from its course and just managed to miss Leo's side. The moment he landed would be a perfect opening for an attack. —Except no one was in position.

"Armor!"

Just as Leo's voice activated sequence ended, Lu Gonghu's twin fists impacted directly on Leo's chest.

It was a Tiger Claw launched with eye dazzling speed.

Leo's body flew sideways and crashed into one of the cars that acted as part of the barricade.

"Damn it!"

Erika's Orochimaru swung downward.

This time, Lu Gonghu easily dodged the downward swing of the sword.

The downward swing of the odachi did not violently impact on the ground, but bounced upwards and sliced towards Lu Gonghu's abdomen. Inertia was not restored upon the swing downwards, but rather, concurrent with the slice upwards. This was one of the alternate techniques of Yamatsunami.

"Yamatsunami Tsubamegaeshi".

Nevertheless, while the weight of the blow was maintained, its speed was not; therefore, it was unable to break through Lu Gonghu's Steel Qigong. The blade slid across Lu Gonghu's abdomen as he bore down on Erika.

Erika's left hand released Orochimaru and used her forearm to eat Lu Gonghu's attack.

Both Orochimaru and Erika were sent flying.

For a tiny instant, astonishment crossed Lu Gonghu's features.

There wasn't much sense that his blow connected, so in that instant, Erika must have activated Orochimaru's inertia cancel ability.

Yet, unlike Leo, Erika crashed into the roadblock and didn't get back up. If the inertia was entirely canceled, then even running into the barricade itself should yield no injury. This must be because the ability wasn't able to completely absorb the blow.

Lu Gonghu immediately concentrated everything on Mari.

However, that tiny fraction of an instant was enough to present a golden opportunity.

By the time Lu Gonghu's eyes rested on Mari, her right hand shifted to reveal three thin, circular containers held between her fingertips.

Lu Gonghu immediately held his breath. He had not forgotten the magic that caused him to suffer so much. If he only held his breath while in the throes of oxygen deprivation, the air with lower oxygen content would still pass into the lungs and ravage the body. Hence Lu Gonghu plugged his esophagus and physically held his breath.

Yet on Mari's side, she wasn't using the same tactics either. Her advantage over others lay not in overwhelming magic power or swift activation speed, but her versatility in multiple magics and the ability to combine them to simultaneously chain multiple magics, a high class technique that was extremely difficult for her opponents to defend against. At First High, Hattori might possess a similar ability, but in terms of anti-personnel combat, Mari's complexity and versatility put all others to shame. Her expertise lay in striking at exposed sensory organs, such as auditory, olfactory senses in order to take away the enemy's fighting ability using magic. Thanks to these skills, Mari was able to stand shoulder to shoulder with Magicians who were direct descendants from the Ten Master Clans like Katsuto and Mayumi. The three of them together were known collectively as the "Triumvirate".

Lu Gonghu's White Tiger Armor was a traditional piece of Chinese armor and was not airtight, which was something that couldn't be helped for magical devices enchanted with Ancient Magic. Traditionally, airborne weapons were not used in the heat of combat where friend and foe were locked in close quarters, which was why the execution of the White Tiger Armor did not take that into account.

Yet, there was a Magician here who used airborne attacks in close combat range with nary a regard to the "traditional" way of doing things.

Manipulating the air flow, Mari combined the chemicals wafting from the three small containers and sent a smell that induced drunkenness into Lu Gonghu's nose that led directly to the olfactory organ.

Lu Gonghu's body had undergone poison resistance training, so he was able to overcome the chemical's effects. However, just as his physical body was recovering, the triblade was bearing down on his throat. Seeing the black string attached to the blade — "Pressure Slash" closing in, Lu Gonghu chose evasive action over parrying the blow.

Thus, Lu Gonghu flipped backwards while kicking his feet outward. Although this was a kick with no technique and pure force, he easily sent Mari's body hurtling through the air.

While taking evasive action to avoid the incoming repulsion field blade, he relaxed his wind pipe.

His eyes that were facing skyward caught sight of a white block flying towards his head.

The size was about a child's fist and the dry ice was dropping at a speed that the eye could follow, so Lu Gonghu used his right fist to meet the block.

The second Lu Gonghu's palm came into contact, the dry ice block reverted to carbon dioxide and began to condense as it rushed towards Lu Gonghu. The high density carbon dioxide rushed into Lu Gonghu's wind pipe and filled his lungs.

That was Mayumi's anti-personnel finishing strike "Dry Meteor". It was a magic that combined all four processes of carbon dioxide convergence, condensation, acceleration and release. The magic relied on the shock wave and carbon dioxide poisoning to render the enemy immobile.

One of the finest close combat Magicians fell before the onslaught of the young woman nicknamed the "Magic Shooter" for her prowess in long-range precision shooting that ranked in the top 10 in the world.

"Mari, are you hurt?"

"Erika! Leo! You guys alright?"

Kanon and Mikihiko came running forward. Isori was following behind Kanon with an exhausted visage. They appeared to have taken care of all the other enemies besides Lu Gonghu.

"I'm fine, thanks to the armor."

"Kanon, I think they're OK."

Mari immediately replied. Mayumi turned her eyes toward the barricade's side.

"Leo looks to be fine as well."

Leo clumsily clambered off the ground and was joking with Mikihiko. The armor created by Fortifying Magic must have kicked in in time.

"...I'm OK too."

The last person, Erika, lay on the ground while grumbling.

"Erika!?"

Mikihiko frantically hurried over while concern flooded Leo's face.

Just as Mari turned her gaze to her, Erika leaped off the ground to her feet.

"Erika, are you well enough to stand?"

Erika's surprising action rendered Mikihiko and Leo speechless as their jaws dropped whereas Isori asked her in concern.

"I'm OK. Just a mild concussion, so I lost consciousness for a bit there."

Following that, Erika sighed deeply.

"Man, I still lost."

Rather than being pleased that the enemy was defeated, she cared far more that she was beaten in battle. Such a comment that befitted Erika's personality perfectly caused Mikihiko and Leo to relax and break into laughter.

◊ ◊ ◊

Chen Xiangshan was walking along a corridor leading to the Magic Association side branch by himself. Although this was a special operation, he was making no attempt to hide the sound of his footsteps and was just walking normally. Although he had not taken the elevator or escalator from the first floor and was only taking the stairs, he had yet to be discovered by anyone.

All of those watchful gazes were concentrated on his subordinates drawing all the attention by the hillside. He knew of this and never doubted that for a second, because he had arranged for this to happen from the very beginning. In his conspicuous white armor, Lu Gonghu was the perfect bait.

Ghostwalker was a magic that selected positions based on fortune. Still, much like how ninjutsu was seen as solely a physical attribute despite its nature as a high class ability, the Ancient Magic — Ghostwalker also had a side of its own.

It was a magic that manipulated the vectors. Based on the user's wishes, this secretive magic could redirect other people's attention to the desired location.

People with their vectors scrambled would never locate the target. Much like someone who intended to walk straight forward but was actually walking in circles, or maybe seeing a carriage plainly in walking distance but never able to catch up. Ghostwalker was a specialized branch of mental interference magic.

Unrestricted by physical parameters, consciously manipulating the target's direction was the basics of Ghostwalker. Thanks to the assistance of his subordinates, Chen easily reached the Kantou branch of the Japanese Magic Association.

He pushed against the door only to find that the door was locked. This was within his calculations. Chen quickly removed a terminal and pressed it against the key pad. He was using Gold Electron Silkworms to break through the locking mechanism and bypass this physical barrier. Although the alarm sounded because the locking mechanism was breached, Chen didn't mind in the slightest because he had plenty of time before the Association members returned. The moment Chen stepped into the side branch of the Magic Association — he was surrounded by a surreal, chilling air.

"So that is Ghostwalker. I learned something new today."

A delightful and charming voice traveled to Chen's ears. He was unable to move freely despite the fact that he wasn't frozen, so he had to force himself to look towards where the voice came from.

Standing there was an impossibly beautiful young woman, and she was no artificial projection that could only be found in the realm of the fey. And she was smiling coldly at him.

"Shiba Miyuki..."

"Since you already know my name, that means you are the ones who have been troubling Onii-sama recently."

For some reason, Miyuki's voice contained a feeling of assurance.

Despite the questions Chen had on the subject, he opened his mouth to ask another question.

"Why are you here? Did my magic not take effect...?"

Miyuki's smile seemed to raise the temperature somewhat.

Just this alone was enough to send Chen's heart beating wildly.

"That's because I received a warning. Be careful of the vectors."

Chen's eyes widened. That implied that someone had already seen through his magic.

"Honestly, just this warning alone was rather hard to comprehend. Since I was warned to watch the vectors, I might as well be on guard against all 360 degrees. I know I'll get something this way."

That's complete bull crap, Chen thought. If that alone was sufficient to break Ghostwalker, then the technique would have gone extinct long ago. Yet — the reality was that his spell had been broken. Just as he was considering this, Chen's body detected a different chill than the cold air that was surrounding him.

"Fortunately, we have a Magician on our side who can see the unseeable, so we could catch your figure even if we couldn't see your magic."

That was entirely different from guarding every vector! Chen wanted to point this out, but his mouth was unable to utter a single sound.

"Regardless, since you are the perpetrator, I'm sure everyone would be more relaxed if you disappeared."

Miyuki revealed an adorable smile as if she was incredibly pleased.

Within that smile, Chen realized what his fate would be.

It was only now that Chen discovered that his body temperature was dropping at an unnatural rate.

"You can take a small nap. I've made great strides so I guarantee you will not sleep forever."

Accompanied by that voice, Chen's consciousness was submerged in darkness.

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At the same time that Miyuki captured Chen Xiangshan, Tatsuya and Yanagi were closing in on the enemy's jugular.

Although Katsuto and the volunteers under his command were also aggressively pursuing the enemy, they were doing so by foot and didn't possess the sheer mobility of Tatsuya's group.

Under the conditions where soldiers were capable of independent flight, the Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion fully utilized this revolutionary application of flying troops to its utmost as they outflanked and cut off the enemy from the flank and rear.

Originally, the Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion was an experimental unit meant to test the newest magical techniques for military purposes.

Using Mobile Suits to achieve maximum flexibility on the battlefield was right up their alley.

Since the modern era, offensive weaponry continued to outstrip defensive weaponry in performance. Tank armor could be destroyed by infantry carrying guided missile weapon systems, and infantry had long since learned to adopt scattered formations.

With the enemy in a scattered formation, each detachment could be taken out one at a time with sufficient mobility and attack power.

Rather than destroying each unit, they were taking out the troops that made up each of the scattered units.

Using a new tactic only made possible by the Mobile Suits' mobility and firepower from their equipment, the Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion routed the enemy invaders.

Rifles with increased penetration.

Guided missiles with warheads tipped with gas that only expanded in flammable directions.

The Electromagnetic Particle Cannon that used electromagnetic power to fire high temperature metallic particles.

Weapons that could not be created without magic due to component or design issues were demonstrating their might.

Of course, magic was equally active.

Of all the magic present, one of the most noteworthy was Captain Yanagi's "Thousand Tatami".

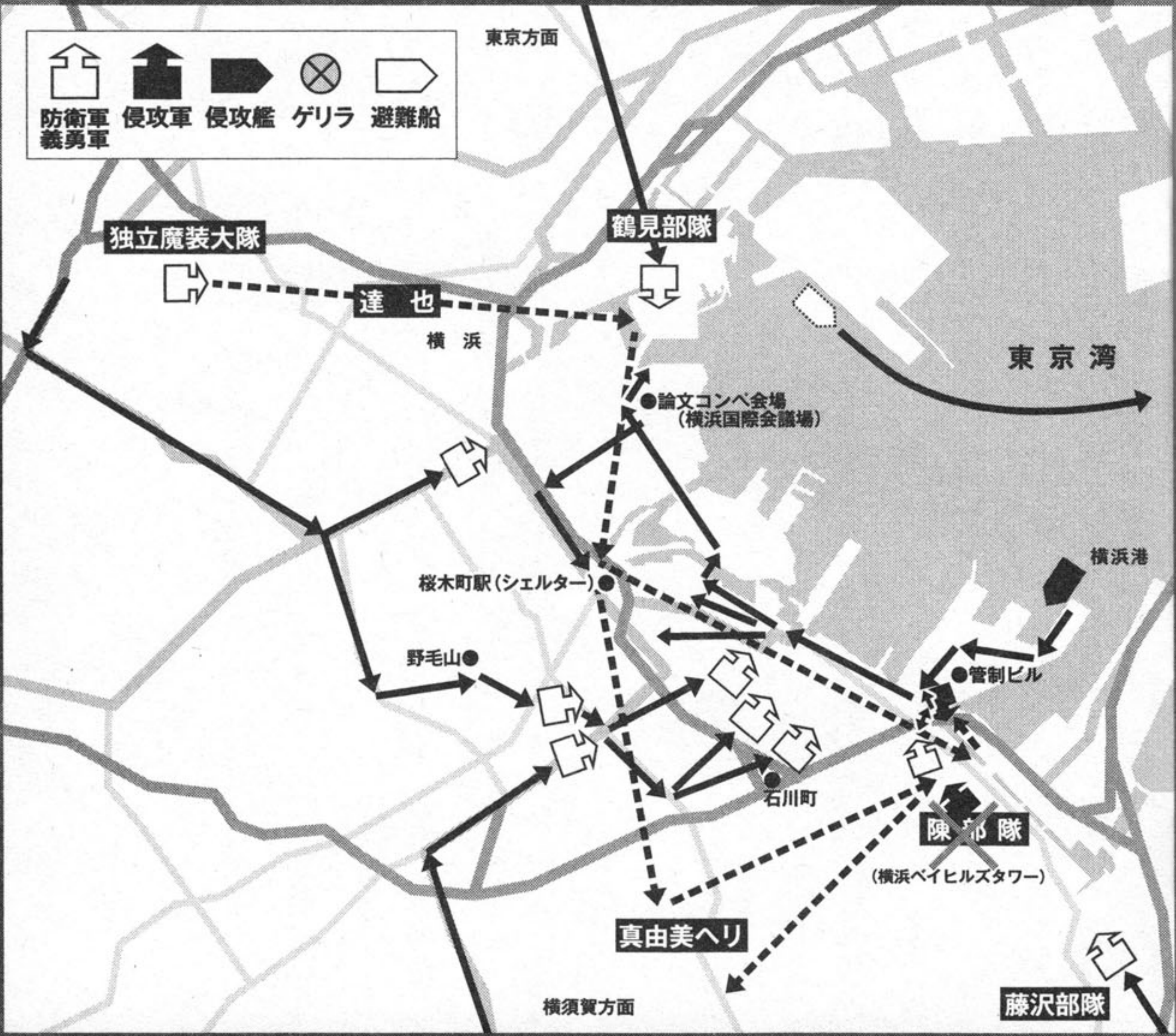
And Tatsuya's "Mist Dispersal".

Certainly, the sight of a metallic block weighing several tons repeatedly flipping over was awe inspiring, but no matter how impressive, Yanagi's "Thousand Tatami" was only support magic and lacked the power to deliver the finishing blow to the enemy.

In contrast, "Mist Dispersal" was considerably more mundane and quiet.

There was no sound or emitted light.

横浜事変
概略図
5


防衛軍
義勇軍
侵攻軍
侵攻艦
ゲリラ
避難船
東京方面
独立魔装大隊
鶴見部隊
達也
横浜
東京湾
論文コンペ会場
（横浜国際会議場）
横浜港
桜木町駅（シェルター）
野毛山
管制ビル
石川町
陳部隊
（横浜ベイヒルズタワー）
真由美ヘリ
横須賀方面
藤沢部隊

西暦2095年10月30日
午後5時30分 現在

To reduce the chance of triggering a gunpowder or fuel explosion, he raised the degree of decomposition so that the easily flammable materials would not ignite.

All he did was erase them all.

Dissipated to dust, transformed into steam and then scattered. That was all he did.

Just like that, the very existence of the enemy and their machines faded.

The magic that did not even leave behind a corpse completely shattered the enemy morale.

They had only been in contact with the enemy for 15 minutes.

That was already the enemy's limit.

Unable to bear the loss in manpower and the even greater collapse of morale, the invading army broke completely.

Chapter 13

The Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion finally caught sight of the camouflaged vessel that served as the enemy base.

The enemy invested approximately 20 large APCs with wheels, 60 bipedal tanks, and 800 combat personnel that included large numbers of Magicians.

Although this was insufficient to capture a territory, this was more than enough firepower for one battle. However, they were currently mired in a state of annihilation where all APCs and bipedal tanks were destroyed and infantry losses exceeded 70%.

The force on the front line responsible for routing them was the same 40 man flying unit.

The Yokohama Incident was approaching its final stage.

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Completing his role as the commanding officer for the volunteers, Katsuto received a communication from the Magic Association side branch.

"The enemy vessel is departing our shores!"

Hearing that report, Katsuto's brows slightly furrowed to portray his astonishment.

"The enemy should not have been able to retreat yet."

Currently, there were no longer any enemy combatants still fighting anywhere in sight.

The unit they were fighting just a moment ago had fled after leaving a rear guard behind.

Even the surviving members of the rear guard had surrendered.

Even so, they couldn't possibly have boarded all the remnants on such short notice.

There should still be enemy forces remaining along the coastline.

"The enemy appears to have abandoned any attempt at recovering their remaining forces. Shall we turn to eradication?"

The communications officer, whose age was roughly the same as Katsuto, asked Katsuto this question with his eyes sparkling. After bitter, continuous fighting with lots of allied losses, a vengeful spirit was only to be expected.

That being said, it was precisely for this reason that Katsuto shook his head.

"That is not our responsibility. We do not have to take unnecessary risks, so leave the rest to the JSDF."

"—Understood!"

He probably wasn't satisfied with that answer, but he didn't disobey the Magician from the Ten Master Clans responsible for leading them to victory.

From the young man's mouth, the order was issued to all volunteer units to cease combat operations.

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The battalion from Tsurumi came from the north, whereas a unit from Fujisawa was finally on approach from the south. From the west, there was the garrison from Tsuchiya with elements from the Fujisawa units.

Unable to sustain the pressure exerted from all three fronts, the enemy abandoned all attempts to recover the amphibious units and began to retreat.

Not that Yanagi ever intended to allow the enemy vessel that was frantically hoisting anchor to escape.

"Leave the enemies that haven't escaped to the squads behind us. We're taking the fight to the enemy vessel and taking it down!"

While it was possible to use the Mobile Suit's aerial mobility to fly over the enemy remnants on the ground and board the enemy vessel to directly assault the interior, Yanagi opted not to use that strategy due to the inherent risk and waste of time.

Using the soldiers armed with rifles that had amplified penetration power as escorts, he pulled the soldiers armed with guided missiles tipped with directional gas detonators into the center and formed an assault unit.

However, just as they were about to take flight, a voice called for him to desist.

"Captain Yanagi, please do not launch a direct assault on the enemy vessel."

"Fujibayashi, what's going on?"

Fujibayashi was the one who interjected over the intercom.

"The enemy vessel is using hydrazine fuel batteries. Sinking that vessel in Tokyo Bay would negatively affect the water quality too severely."

Yanagi lightly clucked his tongue. He wasn't going to ask why she knew something like this.

Grasping the streaming beam of electrons and using magic to backtrack the target was one of Fujibayashi's favorite magic tactics.

Fujibayashi was able to tell the difference between normal Magicians and "Boosters" simply by reading the weak brain waves from up to 1 km out. Thus, identifying the molecular composition of the massive store of fuel without any radiation screens posed no challenge for her.

"So what are we going to do?"

"Fall back, Yanagi."

"Commander?"

The transmission target suddenly changed, prompting a surprised outburst from Yanagi. This did not originate from the alteration to the change in target, but to the order itself.

"Do not misunderstand. We are not ending the battle here. Leave the cleanup of the enemy remnants to the units from Tsurumi and Fujisawa, your group is to return immediately."

"Understood."

He must have managed to organize his thoughts while receiving the message, but this time there was no hesitation in his voice.

Soldiers using the Mobile Suits to achieve flight were excellent for blitzing the enemy headquarters or launching surprise attacks on the enemy rear, but they were ill suited for combat situations like cleanup that required massive manpower and time.

In addition, even though they raised efficiency by gathering the elite troops for this, prolonged use of magic would still lead to exhaustion.

Yanagi gave the order for his troops to RTB[5].

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After handing command of the battalion to Yanagi, Major Kazama led Captain Sanada, Lieutenant Fujibayashi and Tatsuya to the roof of the Bay Hills Tower.

The cleanup process (sweeping out the last of the enemy remnants and returning the combat zone to a non-combat zone) was largely finished. Although there were scattered flashes and gunfire dotted across the landscape, everything should fall silent by nightfall. In regards to the collapsed tunnel and the subsequently buried underground shelter, initial estimates believed they would be able to open a route to the shelter tomorrow.

The people in that shelter were actually in a more comfortable environment than the ones living in temporary shelters erected on the surface.

Right now, the time was 6 in the evening.

Dusk — the hour of the devil.

"Enemy vessel is at Sagaminada and heading south at 30 knots."

Lieutenant Fujibayashi reviewed the portable observation device she carried and reported this to Kazama.

"That's in the middle ground between Oshima and the Boso Peninsula. There will be no problems if we sink it there."

Nodding at Fujibayashi's words, Kazama turned to Sanada.

"Release the seal on Third Eye."

"Understood."

Receiving the key card from Kazama's hands, Sanada unlocked the seal on the large case next to him with a rather incautious, even delighted, expression.

This was a case hastily shipped to them from the headquarters in Kasumiura.

The complex lock consisted of a card key, blood pattern verification, password, and voice-print verification.

"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity"

[Password Confirmed]

The vocal response was originally unnecessary but happened to be one of Sanada's hobbies, despite the fact that this seal was no joke at all.

Inside, there was a large rifle-shaped Specialized CAD.

Sanada personally removed that CAD, "Third Eye", and handed it to Tatsuya, who was still decked out in the Mobile Suit with his helmet on.

Tatsuya pulled out the cord from the gun stock and connected it to his right wrist. The connection would run through the lines in the interior of the Mobile Suit and link directly to the helmet.

"Special Lieutenant Ooguro."

Kazama called out Tatsuya's alias.

"Activate Material Burst and sink the enemy vessel."

"Yes, sir."

A trace of anxiety was mixed within Tatsuya's voice.

Although the last time he used "Material Burst" was in combat 3 years ago, the success of the magic itself was not in question.

That anxiety came from his eagerness to give it another go.

Tatsuya turned to face the south and set the rifle stock against his shoulder.

"Establishing connection with observation camera in the stratosphere."

Keeping an eye on the observation device in the shape of a notepad, Fujibayashi reported to Kazama.

There was no need to inform Tatsuya.

That was because an image from the connection appeared on Tatsuya's visor — the infrared image of the enemy vessel.

A platform equipped with cameras to watch the national border that was in the stratosphere over Japan sent the image through Third Eye's antennae.

Using the same image that Fujibayashi saw to verify the target, Tatsuya began to search for the enemy vessel's external status from the information dimension.

There were countless water droplets covering the hull. Among them, he selected the water droplet clinging to the deck that was directly above the hydrazine fuel canister.

The camera's magnification was unable to identify each individual droplet, so he used Third Eye's remote precision targeting auxiliary system and finished aiming by visually perceiving the information.

"Material Burst, activate."

Tatsuya murmured and squeezed the trigger.

The enemy vessel traveling south from Sagaminada was lulled into a sense of security.

"As expected, the Japanese military did not attempt to pursue."

"Hmph...... Those guys don't have the balls."

"Because they're afraid of a hydrazine spill?"

"It's the same thing. They could only watch as the enemy retreated to safety because they're still stuck on hypocrisy like environmentalism."

Surely soldiers from any country would resist adopting a defeatist mentality.

While they believed that they were still being observed by artificial satellites or platforms in the stratosphere, they had faith that they were no longer in danger of further attack.

This didn't exactly constitute carelessness on their part. Generally speaking, if something were to happen then the attack would have happened by now. At the very least, there should be pursuit from naval ships or aircraft.

"......Remember, we will avenge this humiliation in spades."

More than one or two officers present had already taken a fresh assault for granted and vowed vengeance.

Right now, they were just about to pass east of Oshima.

Abruptly, the alarm klaxons wailed.

That was the alarm for fluctuations in psion waves, indicating that they were being targeted by a CAD's auxiliary targeting system.

"What's going on?"

The captain of the vessel must be calling for a sitrep.

That was only natural, given that there wasn't even a hint of the enemy within a 10 km radius.

Yet, the captain of the camouflaged vessel wasn't even able to finish that short sentence.

A scorching ball of light manifested on deck.

Shock waves were created because the air was rapidly being heated and the deck melted to create a flow of metallic steam, instantaneously setting alight anything flammable, which included the hydrazine, as the colossal fireball devoured the entire vessel.

The burning hell born of Material Burst could be verified on the rooftops of the Bay Hills Tower through the observation cameras from the stratosphere.

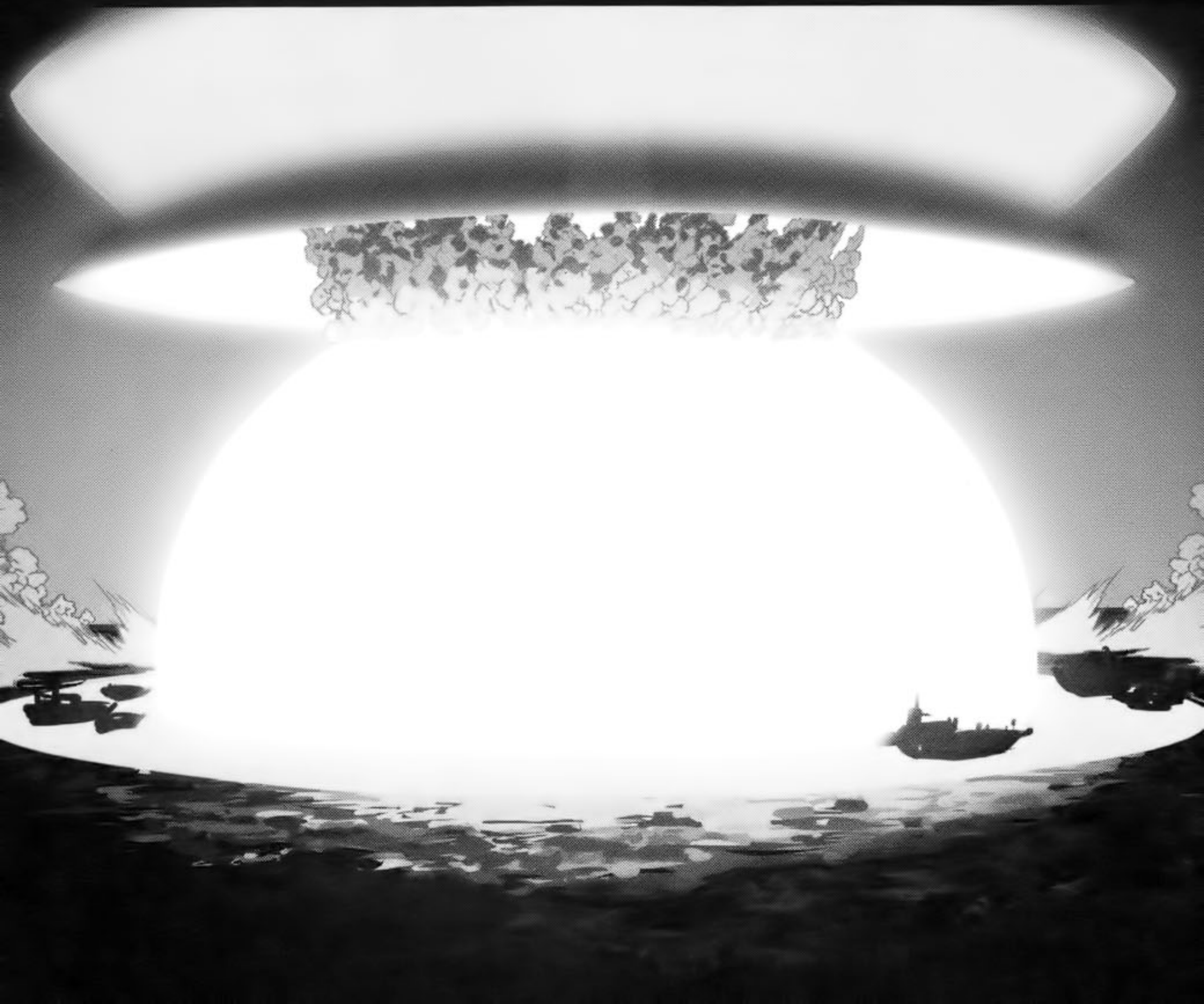
The ultimate in Decomposition Magic, "Material Burst".

Magic that could decompose matter into energy.

This was not an annihilation reaction. Since this was directly decomposing matter down into energy, there was no loss of energy from the collision between electrons and positrons that would be seen in annihilation reactions. Based on Einstein's Formula, the energy created was mass multiplied by the speed of light squared.

The energy released from one drop of water, a paltry 50 milligrams of matter, was equivalent to 1000 tons of TNT.

That much heat energy was immediately released from the space that one drop of water occupied.



"......Confirmed explosion at location of enemy vessel. Visual confirmation impossible due to the steam created by the explosion, but the ship is expected to be sunk."

"Vessel confirmed to be sunk. Any danger of a tsunami?"

Tatsuya corrected his posture and inquired of Fujibayashi as she was making her report from the observation device.

"Don't worry. There's no sign of a tsunami."

"We were able to hit a 50 mg drop of water from approximately 80 kilometers out...... 'Third Eye' has fulfilled its designed purpose."

Sanada gleefully reported.

Kazama silently nodded in regards to Sanada's report and congratulated Tatsuya.

"Excellent work."

"Yes, sir."

Nodding in response to Tatsuya's salute, Kazama announced the end to combat operations.

◊ ◊ ◊

Sitting alone in the bar, Zhou Gongjin received word that the vessel that attacked Yokohama had been sunk. He received a secret communique from his master who had tabs on information from all across the world.

Zhou Gongjin smiled thinly. He was not melancholic about their deaths in any way. In the end, they were only people who happened to share ancestors who dwelt in the same country. Their country didn't provide an ounce of protection at any point, but they still had the gall to demand others to slave away and provide resources for them as if it was a matter of course. He had no reason to hold a favorable impression of them, just as he bore no positive feelings towards this country's government.

It was an excellent thing that the country's strength had been weakened, Zhou thought. A decrease in national power implied a rise in economic value. If every country's national power decreased, binding laws would weaken as well, which would allow him more freedom of movement.

This time, the goal was to reduce this country's magic power by drawing large numbers of combat Magicians to their death in battle, which appeared to have ended in failure. However, the other country suffered considerable damage. Furthermore, that country was predicted to mobilize their Strategic Class Magician. His master had already arranged everything. This way, this country would undoubtedly dispatch their own Strategic Class Magician.

Which side is going to win? Or was this going to be mutually assured destruction?

Zhou gently shook the wine in his glass and revealed a malevolent smile.

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Returning home, Miyuki spent the night alone.

It wasn't a rarity for her to be by herself.

Due to exercises with the Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion, there were times when Tatsuya was not at home.

At those times, she would definitely receive a line from Tatsuya, and today was no exception.

Also, Miyuki and her brother would always be connected no matter how great the distance.

This was no abstract or ideological concept, her brother's strength was always watching her surroundings and guarding her against all threats.

Just as he was now.

Even if she halted her interference towards her brother, her brother's guardianship would never cease.

Tatsuya would always be subconsciously watching Miyuki.

Despite his lack of choice in the matter, this idea still delighted Miyuki.

Just then, the melody from the phone rang out.

Typically, this melody would not ring out.

— Fate is beckoning —

Just as the phrase goes, this melody always decided the siblings' destiny.

She hurriedly got to her feet, and lightly groomed herself before standing in front of the camera and accepting the video call.

"Long time no see, Oba-sama."

"I apologize for the late hour, Miyuki."

"No, that's hardly the case."

Raising her deeply bowed head, there was an elegant woman dressed in a pitch dark dress smiling warmly on the other side of the screen.

While her actual age was over 40, her appearance gave the impression she was in her 30s.

Not only was the image like this, her actual appearance was the same.

Unlike Miyuki's beauty that defied description, this was a woman full of feminine charms and enchanting mature beauty.

She was the twin sister of the siblings' mother.

The current head of the Yotsuba Family.

One of the strongest Magicians in the world.

Yotsuba Maya.

"Is that so......? Still, today was quite the hectic day."

"Sorry for making you worry."

After the concise response, she once more bowed gracefully in front of the camera.

Maya nodded leisurely at her niece's posture.

"I'm more at ease now that I've seen your face. Well, not that there was anything to worry about since Tatsuya was with you...... Speaking of which, where is Tatsuya right now?"

As if suddenly recalling this, or maybe she just happened onto this subject as Maya made her inquiry.

However, Miyuki was not fooled.

She understood very clearly that this was her aunt's true question.

"My sincere apologies. Onii-sama still has to handle some post operation duties and has not returned."

"Ah! I can't believe Tatsuya, leaving behind his cute little sister, where has he run off to squander his time?"

What a headache, Maya pressed a hand to her face and used this exaggerated motion to portray her bemusement.

"I am mortified that we have caused you to worry. I don't always know where Onii-sama is at any given time......"

In comparison, Miyuki remained in her impeccable posture and respectful attitude.

"However, Oba-sama, there is no need to worry. Onii-sama's power is always protecting me."

"Ah, that's true. Miyuki, even though you have unlocked the seal, Tatsuya can never abandon his oath."

Maya said with a small smile. That smile seemed to reprimand Miyuki for unsealing Tatsuya's shackles without Maya's prior approval.

"Indeed, it is just as you say, Oba-sama. No matter where Onii-sama goes, he will never relinquish his duties as a guardian of his own will."

Despite this, Miyuki's earnest attitude had no openings to exploit.

"Hearing you say that certainly eases my mind. Oh yes, why don't the two of you come home next Sunday. It's been a long time since I saw the two of you face to face."

"I am overwhelmed by your invitation. I will convey this message to Onii-sama when he returns."

"I look forward to it. Then, good night, Miyuki."

"Good night, Oba-sama."

The screen vanished and Miyuki let out a deep breath after making sure the link was severed before collapsing on the sofa.

She was under enormous pressure whenever facing her aunt. For some reason, she always picked the times when her brother was absent — actually she might be intentionally picking this time — to call in.

After all, this was their aunt she was talking about here. She must comprehend things beyond Miyuki's understanding.

Even so, Miyuki could not afford to get careless in front of Maya. Any inappropriate statement on her part would lead to further restrictions on her brother's movement.

She pulled open the curtains and gazed towards the western skies where her brother was.

In order to finish this incident once and for all, her brother was probably accompanying Kazama to Tsushima.

At least, that's what the message Miyuki had received said, and Tatsuya would never lie to Miyuki.

Her heart told her that this was necessary.

For Miyuki, nothing pleased her more than Tatsuya being needed by others.

But today,

Tonight,

Her heart yearned,

and desired for Tatsuya to stay by her side.

Right now, Miyuki was alone in their house.

It was far too lonely and difficult to bear the burden of the lives she took all by herself.

(Onii-sama......)

Calling out to her brother in her mind, she gently wrapped her arms around herself.

As if feeling the residual warmth from her brother's gentle embrace earlier, Miyuki's hands tightened around her body.

◊ ◊ ◊

October 31st, 2095 AD.

Today was Halloween, but since Tatsuya wasn't a Christian, the day bore no special meaning to him.

Right now, he had arrived at Tsushima Base.

Thirty five years ago, during the Third World War, which was the tumultuous period where countless wars broke out over a 20 year period, this island was attacked by the Great Asian Alliance's autonomous regional forces from Korea and 70% of the residents were massacred.

The reason was that they didn't want to provide any reason to antagonize their neighbors, leading to a situation where an island on the national border was bereft of even the minimal garrison troops.

The Korean Army also had their reasons. Simply put, that was just how those times were.

Regardless, 70% of the residents were lost, the 20% that fled incurred injuries both severe and light, with the remaining 10% of the residents captured. The simple fact of that matter was that the island had been captured.

After reclaiming Tsushima, the Japanese government converted this island into a fortress.

This was a front line base with large scale military harbors and solid walls, complete with cutting edge anti-aircraft and anti-ship weaponry.

This was Tsushima Base.

"Special Lieutenant, please come to the War Room."

The summons came over the transmission device he wore on his left ear.

From the roof, Tatsuya returned to the interior of the base.

He watched one side of the sea where traces of the Korean Peninsula could be seen.

"You're here."

Seeing Tatsuya enter the room still decked out in the Mobile Suit with the helmet down and salute, Kazama returned the salute and gestured for him to take a seat.

Although several individuals looked askance at him wearing the pitch black combat uniform with the helmet and visor down, Tatsuya didn't care in the slightest and sat in a chair near the corner of the War Room.

Slightly behind Tatsuya, Yanagi and Sanada appeared.

"As expected,"

Once everyone was gathered, Kazama started speaking without any forewarning.

While Tatsuya and company were accustomed to this, many within the base were unable to hide their confusion.

"The enemy fleet is preparing to launch. Please examine this image."

A large display screen that took up an entire wall lit up and displayed photos that must have been taken from satellites. There were ten large vessels with two times as many destroyers and torpedo boats making preparations to launch.

"This photograph was taken 5 minutes ago. Based on this estimate, the enemy will launch two hours from now at the latest. Based on the scale of mobilization, rather than being a single strike, their aim appears to be occupying the Kyushu, Sanin, and Hokuriku regions."

"Are they actually planning on going to war?"

Hearing Kazama's words, one of the young lieutenants piped up. Based on his age, he must have recently been transferred to this installation.

"I do believe they've always been at war with us since 3 years ago."

The slightly mocking reply came from Yanagi and not Kazama.

Flushed red with shame, the lieutenant who asked the question quickly backed down.

"My apologies. My subordinates are lacking in decorum."

At the very least, he should allow the other side to save face.

"Still, the conclusion is just as Captain Yanagi said. Forget a peace treaty, there wasn't even a ceasefire negotiated between our country and the Great Asian Alliance. Seeing that there is no message detailing their fleet mobilization, it would be safe to assume that they are preparing for an offensive against our country."

Kazama once more supplied additional details.

According to international convention, large scale naval mobilizations that were for non-military purposes required notification for countries within the navigation range.

During an armistice, or simply when both sides stopped fighting, any undisclosed naval mobilization with unclear motivations could be interpreted as one country preparing to commence hostilities once more.

The atmosphere in the conference room grew tense.

"While the enemy has already finished mobilizing their fleet, regrettably, our navy only started mobilizing yesterday. Right now, we are forced to use land or air-based power to hold off the enemy's naval forces."

The atmosphere grew heavier.

"A tough battle is inevitable."

No one could muster a response.

"Thus, in order to break through the current situation, the Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion will deploy Strategic-Class magic weaponry. This combat operation has already been approved by the Joint Chiefs."

The personnel from the base examined Kazama with curious and expectant gazes.

"In addition, please allow my unit to requisition the First Observation Room. Furthermore, under the assumption that the attack is successful, then at the same time......"

Kazama's explanation continued.

However, Tatsuya felt that there was no need for him to continue listening in.

His mission was to commence the attack as the 'Strategic-Class magic weaponry', nothing more.

He had already reviewed the fortress's data en route.

The First Observation Room was one of the facilities that used low altitude satellites to observe the enemy shores.

Based on that fact alone, Tatsuya understood what was being done there and what was required of him.

Just like yesterday, Tatsuya was armored in the Mobile Suit, with "Third Eye" in hand, as he stood in the center of the First Observation Room.

The screen before him rendered the images from the satellites into 3-D and allowed observation of the enemy formation from any angle. Based on Tatsuya's specifications, the current projection was from 100 meters out at 30 meters above sea level.

"Special Lieutenant Ooguro, are you prepared?"

Sanada asked.

"Preparations complete. Satellite link in good order."

Tatsuya used his helmet to modify his voice before replying to the orders.

"Material Burst, prepare to fire."

Along with Kazama's voice, Tatsuya hefted "Third Eye".

Zhènhai Naval Port.

The Great Asian Alliance fleet gathered on the other side of Geojedo Base.

On the central battleship, a flag fluttered in the wind on what must be the flagship.

He took aim at that flag.

Using the 3-D image from the satellite as a clue, he began to seek out the information body.

The weight of the battle flag was approximately 1 kg.

"Preparations complete."

He softly whispered.

Within the utter stillness of the room, that was more than enough.

"Material Burst, activate."

"Material Burst, activating."

Repeating Kazama's order, Tatsuya pulled the trigger on Third Eye.

From within Tsushima Base, across the strait, directly into Zhènhai Naval Port.

Tatsuya's magic transformed 1 kg of matter directly into energy.

In accordance with Einstein's Formula, the heat energy equated to approximately 20,000,000 tons of TNT.

The screen darkened.

The excess light caused the safety features on the satellites to kick in.

Which was why they could not see the claws of hell tearing through the earth.

On board the flagship moored at Zhènhai Naval Port, the sun suddenly appeared.

This heat defied any other means of conveyance, not that anyone lived to pass this on to future generations.

High temperatures that ran off the charts evaporated the metal hull into metallic steam.

The rapidly swelling air surpassed mach speed.

Amid the gushing infrared rays, shock waves, and metallic steam, the naval and port facilities vanished.

Anything within the vicinity, be they man or object, was evaporated.

People and objects slightly farther off either detonated or were burnt to ash.

The surface of the ocean was roasted by the scorching temperatures, causing countless steam explosions.

The resulting hurricane and tsunami swallowed Geojedo Base on the opposite shore.

If not for Geojedo serving as a levee, even Tsushima Base and Kyushu would have suffered the wrath of the tsunami.

The destruction was not limited only to Zhènhai Naval Port.

The shock waves struck the neighboring military facilities. Perhaps a blessing in disguise, there were no civilian cities near Zhènhai Naval Port.

After the tyrannic inferno passed on, absolutely nothing remained.

Once satellite imaging was restored, everyone in Tsushima Base held their breath without exception.

Some of the younger officers fled to the toilet to retch.

No one could mock them for their weakness.

Even members from the Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion could not hide the paleness of their faces.

For the first time, they beheld with their own eyes what Strategic-Class Magic truly meant.

"Enemy situation?"

After Kazama asked, Fujibayashi frantically swept her eyes back to the observation device.

"Enemy fleet destroyed...... No, completely annihilated. Shall we attack?"

True, occupation would be a simple task now.

However, Kazama shook his head.

"No need. Cancel all subsequent procedures. This operation is over."

"All units, prepare to return!"

At Kazama's order, Yanagi gave the order to retreat.

Tatsuya set Third Eye on the ground.

Hidden beneath the helm, his eyes never wavered in the slightest.

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The Scorched Halloween.

Future historians would look back upon this day and refer to it as such.

It was a turning point in military history, just as it was a turning point in history.

This was the day that magic was proven to have surpassed mechanical, nuclear, and biological arms.

Bared before all was the truth that magic alone determined the outcome between victory and defeat.

This was the true dawn of history for the race known as Magicians, in all of its high glory and darkest suffering.

Afterword

To all those who also bought "Mahouka Koukou no Rettousei" this time, thank you so much.

To those who are reading this book for the first time, this is also an opportunity for us to get to know each other, so please continue to look after me.

For a light novel, the 7th volume of this series is actually a little risky, what are everyone's thoughts about this? Did you find it interesting?

Although writing in this manner during the Showa period was not considered to be radical, however writing in such an out-dated manner during current times can only be deemed as being out of fashion, and therefore I am feeling somewhat uneasy about it.

The most exhausting part about this book are the various inserted military movement charts.

(Maps*Military diagrams) are things that I am clueless about in terms of the methods to draw them, and people who actually know what it is supposed to look like will definitely say "What exactly is this?", however please do forgive me with regards to this point.

The one responsible of interposing this time, Ishida-sama, really had a very difficult time.

This time, the protagonist's group has to wear a few different types of combat armor, and because of all my small requests numerous changes have been made to the design.

Although I, the author, feels that the result is really not too bad......That means that it really is not that bad after all.

In addition, volume 7's main feature is the debut of the various different types of "unique skills" As long as the readers feel excited and happy about it, I as the author will also be satisfied.

With that, I will move on to the scheduled advertising of volume 8.

Firstly, volume 8 is expected to be put on sale by this winter. The main theme for volume 8 will still be "Reminiscence".

The main focus will be on some incidents that happened in the past. As compared to the Web version, the contents of the story will also increase substantially.

Next, although those who read this book may already know, an audio drama DVD is already in the works. It will be put on sale together with volume 8.

In fact, it may be even earlier than volume 8. The contents for the audio drama DVD will be compiled from the "Reminiscence" chapters. A newly written short booklet will also be attached with the DVD.

I believe I have already informed everyone in volume 6, but the first volume of the manga version of "Mahouka Koukou no Rettousei" is published in "Monthly GFantasy", and is currently on sale, together with this volume.

Also, the first volume of the spin-off manga series "Mahouka Koukou no Yuutousei" will be released for sale on October 27, and it will be published by Dengeki Daioh. Everyone, please support it as well!

Lastly, maybe there are already people who know about this, but next month's Dengeki Bunko Magazine will serialize something new. The content will be about the sophomore's chapter of life.

It is based on what happens after volume 7. That's why the publishers will want a few interludes, and will work hard to compile it properly.

With the new serialization from Dengeki Bunko, the audio drama DVD, and also Dengeki Bunko's spin-off, from the start of autumn to winter we will be working at full steam, so everyone, please continue to show your support for "Mahouka Koukou no Rettousei".

(Satou Tsutomu)

コミック版「魔法科高校の劣等生」構成担当の林です。佐島先生、第7巻発売おめでとうございます！ 一読者としても待ってました！ 達也を中心に様々な人間の思惑が戦いを呼んだり、青春ドラマがあったり、緻密な世界背景と少しずつ輪郭が見えてくる謎があったりと、本当にどの部分も引きこまれます。寝食を忘れて読みふけったこの「魔法科高校の劣等生」の面白さを、マンガでも上手く伝えるべく作画のきたうみ先生とともにGファンタジーでコミック版「魔法科高校の劣等生」をこれからも頑張っていきたいと思います！

きたうみつな

スピンオフコミック版「魔法科高校の優等生」を担当させていただいている森夕と申します。「魔法科高校の劣等生」7巻発売おめでとうございます！ とても重要な局面の巻に寄稿できて光栄です。読ませていただいてまず緻密な設定と世界観に驚き、ある地点まで読んで「ああ、だから彼らはそうだったんだ！」と驚いて読み返し一度目では気づかなかった新たな発見に心地良いノックアウトを喰らいました。世界も人間関係も濃密に設定された世界観に酔いしれながら幸福な仕事をさせていただいております。魔法は特別な力だけどけっして万能な力ではなくそれで全て解決できるほど世界は甘くない。それぞれに悩みがあり努力している彼らの魅力を少しでもお伝えできるように頑張りたいと思います。あと個人的に、可愛い女の子がいっぱいなのでそこも力を入れて描いていきたいです。これからもいちファンとして続きを楽しみにしております。

References

1. ↑ BC = Bio-Chemical.
2. ↑ S&D = Search & Destroy.
3. ↑ One of the principal Hindu deities, worshiped as the destroyer and restorer of worlds and in numerous other forms
4. ↑ A famous military general and strategist during the three kingdoms
5. ↑ RTB = Return to base.

Disclaimer

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Credits

Story : Satou Tsutomu
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